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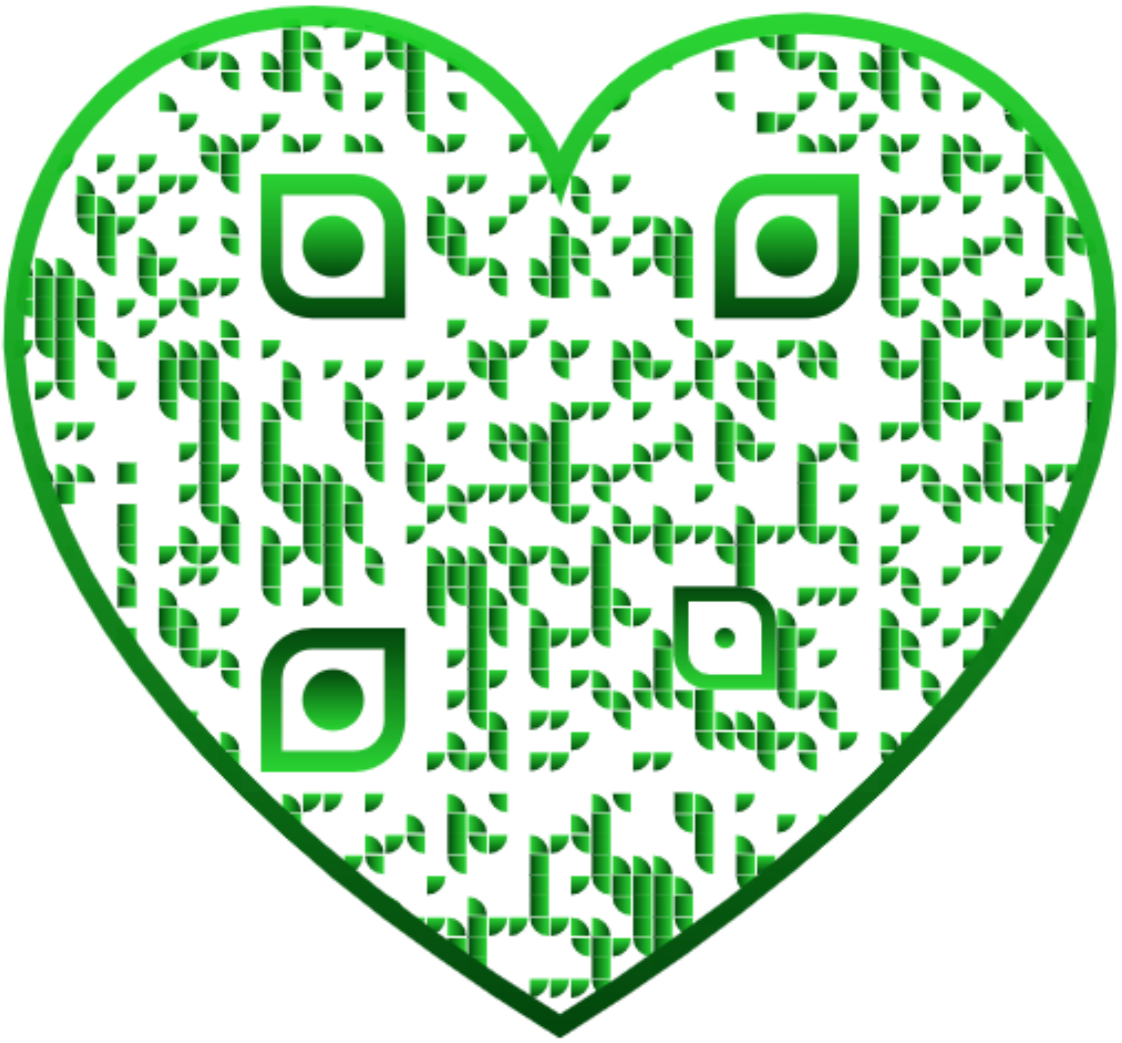

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Tel 01902 730011

Distributed by **Marketforce (UK) Ltd**
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU
Tel +44 (0) 203 787 9001

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Smokin' Tweed

When viewed objectively, the guitar industry is a funny old thing. Try explaining to the non-guitar players among your friends and family that some of the most popular new guitars come pre-distressed to look and feel like 50-year-old vintage examples. Assuming they stay conscious for long enough, you can at least make parallels to shabby chic or jeans that have been aged to resemble a pair of old favourites. Then try explaining that the most revered and sought-after amplifiers are essentially still built using vacuum tube technology from the first half of the 20th Century. Most people wouldn't make the daily commute in a 1950s car, or entrust their weekly shop to a 1950s fridge-freezer, and yet the use of 50s and 50s-inspired amps isn't confined to the lunatic fringe – it's absolutely mainstream.

While huge sections of the guitar community have embraced Kemper, Axe-Fx and digital amps designed for use in a modern living room at volumes that won't wake the kids or the neighbours, the last few years have also seen a parallel move back to the unadulterated simplicity of the gear that powered the subversive, ass-shaking hits of the rock 'n' roll era. From the late 40s through to the 1960s, nobody was making amps better than Fender, and this month we pay tribute to the legendary tweed circuits that, when properly maintained, can be as viable for stage and studio use today as they were when Eisenhower was resident in the White House.

On another note, this month we also say farewell to one member of the *G&B* team and hello to another. After 18 months working on the mag, our fabulous art editor, Debra Barber, is off to be a mum – thanks for your hard work and all the laughs Deb, we'll miss you – while the vastly experienced, highly organised and guitar-addicted Josh Gardner joins us as our new managing editor. So it's hello, and goodbye. Maybe there's a song in that...

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In this issue...

THIS MONTH'S EXPERTS...

DAVE HUNTER

Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*. Check out his column on page 8.

HUW PRICE

Huw spent 16 years as a pro audio engineer, working with the likes of David Bowie, Primal Scream and NIck Cave. His book, *Recording Guitar & Bass*, was published in 2002, leading into his career in guitar journalism. He also builds and maintains guitars, amps & FX.

ED OLESZKO

Longterm friend of the mag Ed owns an all-vintage tweed rig to die for. As the guitarist in a top function band, he has a wealth of experience and an insatiable addiction to gear. Ed lends his expertise to our tweed-tastic cover feature, which begins on page 19...

19 The Need For Tweed

G&B goes in-depth with Fender's most influential amp range – the tweeds

46 Chuck Berry

The late rock 'n' roll icon tells his own remarkable story and a cast of famous fans pay tribute

FEATURES

The Need For Tweed **19**
Fender's 1950s tweed amplifiers were the bedrock of rock 'n' roll, and those designs are still sonic benchmarks today. *G&B* charts the development of the tweed range, puts five classic circuits on test, and gives you some practical advice for using tweed amps today

Chuck Berry **46**
G&B pays tribute to the godfather of rock 'n' roll guitar with a previously unseen interview with the man himself

Hank Marvin **52**
The Stratocaster legend on his brand new album

VINTAGE

Time Machines **95**
1939 Gibson Super 400

Vintage Bench Test **96**
1960 Gretsch Anniversary

Private Collection **106**
Richard Kingsman's vintage Fenders, Gibsons and more

REGULARS

OPENING BARS **6** | LETTERS FROM AMERICA **8** | READER BOARDS **10** | SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE **12** | THE MONEY SHOT **14**

68 Old Is Young Again

A Gibson Custom Made 2 Measure take on Neil Young's 'Old Black' goes under the microscope

GEAR REVIEWS

Gibson Custom Made 2 Measure 1956 Les Paul Heavy Aged **68**
Asher Marc Ford Signature **72**
Loïc Le Pape Steel Junior **74**
Atkin Guitars The Forty Three **76**
Carr Mercury V **80**
Fender '57 Custom Pro-Amp **84**
Blackstar LT-Echo 10 & Fly 3 Bluetooth **89**
Dwarfcraft Devices Happiness, Twin Stags & Eau Claire Thunder **90**
UAD Fender '55 Deluxe **92**

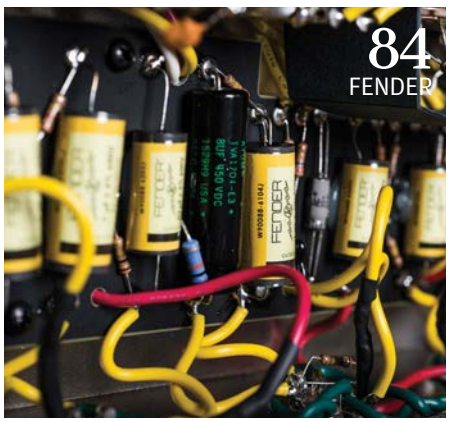
WORKSHOPS

DIY 'Hankcaster' conversion **59**
Paul Balmer shows you how to turn an old Squier Strat into a Hank Marvin-approved instrument

All About... ..... **118**
Huw Price explains the confusing world of neck profiles

Chord Clinic **122**
Rod Fogg talks us through using open strings to create drones and pedal notes in G and D major

72 ASHER



84 FENDER

76 ATKIN

74 LOÏC LE PAPE

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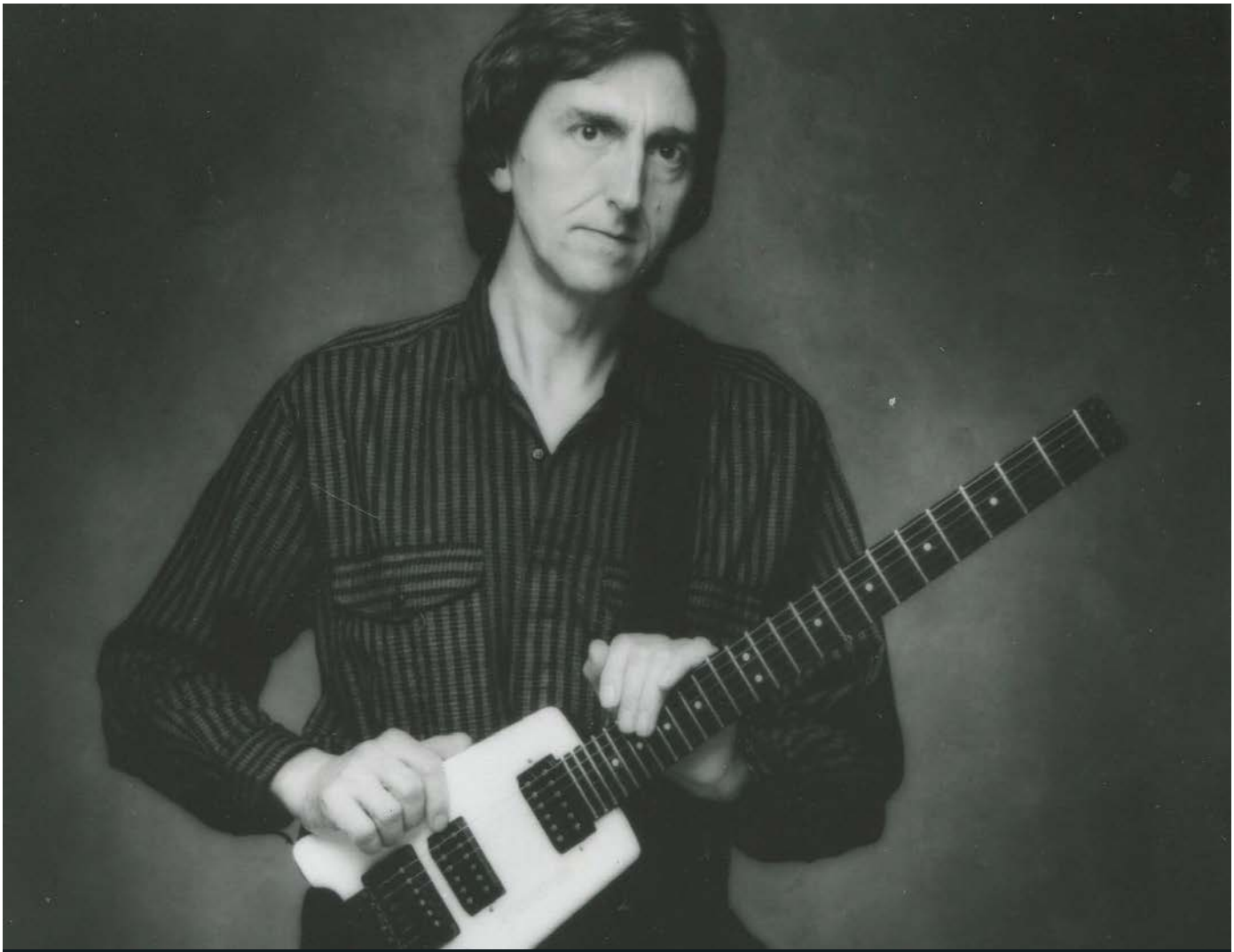
TURN TO PAGE 16

SUBSCRIPTION OFFER **16** READERS' FREE ADS **117** YOUR LETTERS **126** NEW MUSIC **128** COMPETITION **130**

Opening bars...



ALLAN HOLDSWORTH
1946-2017

Guitar & Bass was saddened to hear of the death of legendary British fusion guitarist, Allan Holdsworth, at the age 70 on 15 April 2017.

Holdsworth's daughter, Louise, broke the news of his sudden passing on Facebook. "It is with heavy hearts that we notify everyone of the passing of our beloved father," she wrote. "We would appreciate privacy and time while we grieve the loss of our dad, granddad, friend and musical genius... We are undeniably still in shock with his unexpected death and cannot begin to put into words the overwhelming sadness we are experiencing. He is missed tremendously."

Holdsworth's career began in the late 1960s, playing in a number of cult prog bands, but greater recognition of his virtuosic talents would come in the 1970s. During the middle part of the decade, he played with influential jazz-rockers Soft Machine, Tony Williams' Lifetime, Pierre Moerlen's Gong, and on Yes drummer Bill Bruford's debut solo album. He would later join Bruford in prog supergroup, UK, but left the band following their first album, later saying he "detested" the music.

Holdsworth was known for his remarkably fluid legato, ambitious melodies, and his embracing of MIDI. These qualities came to the fore on his 1982 album, *I.O.U.*, and while the following *Road Games* and *Metal Fatigue* were his most successful releases, record companies often struggled with the challenging nature of his compositions. His solo work was recently compiled as a box set, *The Man Who Changed Guitar Forever*, and he was working on a new album at the time of his death.

> *"I'd steal everything Allan was doing, if only I could figure out what the heck it was that he was doing"*
>
> **JOHN MCLAUGHLIN**

Despite Holdsworth's lack of fame outside of guitar circles, his influence on the technical guitar players who followed him was huge. No less than Eddie Van Halen is a super-fan, and EVH was instrumental in getting Holdsworth a major label deal in the 80s, while the likes of Joe Satriani, Alex Lifeson, John Petrucci, Robben Ford have all cited the Bradford-born guitarist as a big influence.

Speaking on Twitter after Holdsworth's death, Toto guitarist Steve Lukather paid tribute, saying that, "he changed the game and was the sweetest guy ever", while Living Colour's Vernon Reid claimed he, "shifted the fundamental approach of generations of players. He turned a bunch of us inside/upside/downside/out".

But perhaps the most salient description of Holdsworth's creativity came from Mahavishnu Orchestra's John McLaughlin, who once said, "I'd steal everything Allan was doing, if only I could figure out what the heck it was that he was doing."

ONES TO WATCH

Will Stratton

New Jersey-raised singer-songwriter Will Stratton has been remarkably prolific for a man who has only just celebrated his 30th birthday. His latest album, *Rosewood Almanac*, is his sixth since he released his first LP while still in college. Stratton's latest effort is a layered, delicate opus that pulls in folk influences from both sides of the Atlantic, with a dose of Laurel Canyon thrown into the mix, too.

Like many of us though, Will's musical education began in a more classical vein. "I received a Squier for my 12th birthday, but I started on piano when I was four, and so guitar was sort of an escape from the stricture of lessons and practising," he explains to us. "But the fundamentals in piano were incredibly valuable, and I think I still try to make my guitar sound a bit like an upright piano."

This pianistic approach is reflected in his intricate, spellbinding acoustic fingerstyle, which is informed by everyone from Bert Jansch to John Fahey, and Richard Thompson to Leo Kottke – but the root of it all is Nick Drake. "Everything changed for me when I heard his playing, and I started to take music more seriously at that point," Will enthuses. "My older brother got a compilation of his music after that Volkswagen commercial [a 2000 US advert that featured Drake's track, *Pink Moon*] came out and I think I 'borrowed' it from him indefinitely. And that led me to Bert Jansch and Fairport Convention and a whole era of musicians that still speaks to me more than perhaps any other music with words in it."

Fingerstyle acoustic wasn't exactly top of the charts back when Will was woodshedding, but his inspiration for mastering the dextrous technique came from the most folky of instruments. "I got a 12-string guitar right after college," he explains. "All of these songs started tumbling out which ended up on a record called *New Vanguard Blues*, which I self-released. Sometimes an instrument that makes you approach things a little differently can lead to a breakthrough. I think if you approach guitar as a blank slate and just start playing whatever feels good, rather than what you feel you ought to be playing, you'll end up somewhere interesting."

Will studied music composition at university, taking classes from American composer Allen Shawn, and *Rosewood Almanac's* dense arrangements show he's unafraid to meld the worlds of classical and folk – indeed he doesn't see a great deal of difference between the two.

"In a general and maybe reductive way, 'classical' music is a story of people chasing sounds that they find beautiful or viscerally or reflective of larger shifts in society, and it's such a vast and abstract pursuit that you could probably project anything that you want onto it, and I certainly have," he explains. "I'm not certain that there is a whole lot of difference between Erik Satie's fifth Gnossienne and Nick Drake's *Place To Be* in terms of how they might make a listener feel, so I try not to make much of a distinction between listening to notated and free-composed or improvised music."

Rosewood Almanac is a title inspired by his Guild F-30R, and the sound of the wood therein. "I like a lot of woods but I keep coming back to rosewood," he says of his flat-top squeeze. "There's a sort of darkness to the way the lower end sounds on a rosewood-bodied guitar that's been tuned down to C that I really like, and that's true about this Guild that I've been playing."

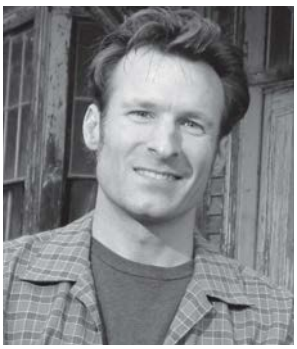
Will's growing notoriety comes having endured great hardship in his still young life. In 2012, Stratton was diagnosed with testicular cancer, and while he's ready to put the past behind him, he'll always carry the lessons it taught him with him in life and in music.

"I'm deeply grateful to still be here and I try to remember what it felt like when I regained my strength and when everything felt brand new again," he affirms. "As far as songwriting goes, I think seismic shifts run through everyone's work if you live long enough. I'm trying to move on from that experience and make my music more outward-looking and empathetic, especially as the world seems to be getting stranger and more tenuous every day." **JG**

TRY IF YOU LIKE Nick Drake, Ryley Walker

Letters from America

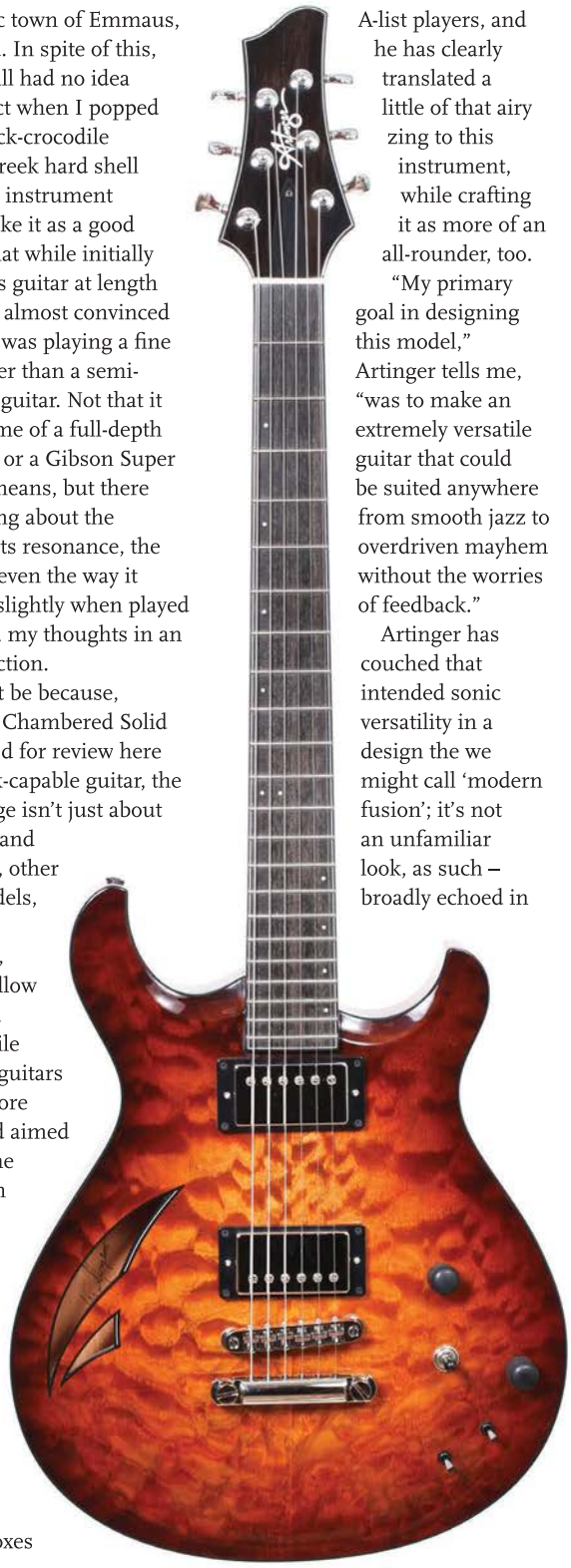
DAVE HUNTER sits down with an electric from boutique Pennsylvanian luthier, Matt Artinger, the Chambered Solid Body



DAVE HUNTER
Dave Hunter is a writer and musician who has worked in the US and the UK. A former editor of this title, he is the author of numerous books including *The Guitar Amp Handbook*, *Guitar Effects Pedals*, *Amped* and *The Fender Telecaster*.

Before receiving this Artinger Chambered Solid Body to check out for *Guitar & Bass*, I'd heard nothing but great things about the work of Matt Artinger, a young guitar-maker based in small historic town of Emmaus, Pennsylvania. In spite of this, however, I still had no idea what to expect when I popped open the mock-crocodile skin Cedar Creek hard shell case that this instrument arrived in. Take it as a good sign, then, that while initially exploring this guitar at length unplugged, I almost convinced myself that I was playing a fine acoustic rather than a semi-solid electric guitar. Not that it had the volume of a full-depth dreadnought or a Gibson Super 400 by any means, but there was something about the liveliness of its resonance, the sustain, and even the way it compressed slightly when played hard, that led my thoughts in an acoustic direction.

This might be because, although the Chambered Solid Body as spec'd for review here is a fully rock-capable guitar, the Artinger range isn't just about playing loud and hard. Indeed, other Artinger models, such as the Semi Hollow, Standard Hollow and Venetian Hollow – while still thinline guitars – are even more nuanced, and aimed squarely at the virtuoso, with archtop-like attributes such as carved wooden trapeze tailpieces (the likes of which you more commonly see on jazzboxes by Benedetto or Monteleone). Artinger has the skills to render hollow and semi-hollow electrics to a level that has landed them in the hands of Steve Kimock, Gil Parris, Mark Goldenberg, and other admirable A-list players, and he has clearly translated a little of that airy zing to this instrument, while crafting it as more of an all-rounder, too.



"My primary goal in designing this model," Artinger tells me, "was to make an extremely versatile guitar that could be suited anywhere from smooth jazz to overdriven mayhem without the worries of feedback."

Artinger has couched that intended sonic versatility in a design the we might call 'modern fusion'; it's not an unfamiliar look, as such – broadly echoed in guitars by makers from PRS to Gene Baker to Patrick Eggle to Joe Knaggs and others – yet Artinger's rendition is all his own. The carved solid, quilted-maple top caps a judiciously chambered mahogany body with dual-asymmetrical cutaways. A cat's-eye burst brings out the top's feathery dimensions beautifully, while a honey brown finish on the back, sides, and back of neck reveal the apparent quality of the mahogany used there. The latter is a one-piece construction with a medium-C profile and a 25-inch scale length, topped by a bound ebony fingerboard. Unseen attributes of this impressive neck include its dual-action truss-rod, and two carbon fibre reinforcement rods, which add stability.

Style Points

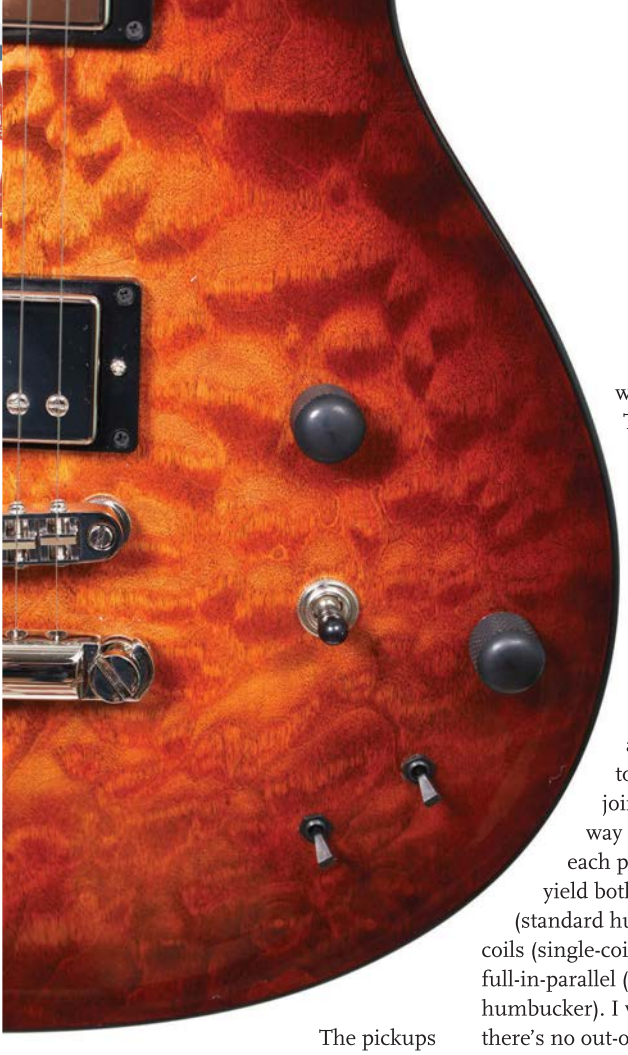
This Chambered Solid Body earns style points for the white key line at the bottom edges of the dual cat's-eye soundholes' binding. This is echoed in the similar white key line, which runs along the interior of the black binding around the ebony fingerboard's perimeter, and encircles the headstock and tiny pearl-dot position markers, which are nevertheless entirely distinct. Furthermore, we also have a pearl signature inlaid on the headstock and 'scalloping' carved between the string slots in the genuine bone nut. Artinger says he does this to all his nuts "purely for aesthetics."

Form further enhances function in the subtly and softly chamfered body edges at the front of each cutaway and upper back, yielding more comfort both to your upper-fret playing and your ribcage alike. The playability is enhanced by the graduated neck heel carve, while the recessed strap-lock buttons are a nice touch. Hardware includes Gotoh's Delta Series tuners (love the touchy-feely buttons on these), and Gotoh tune-o-matic bridge with locking stopbar tailpiece.

KEY FEATURES

Artinger Chambered Solid Body

- **PRICE** Starting at $4,200 (approx. £3,369 plus shipping and any duties)
- **CONTACT** artingerguitar.com, matt@artingerguitar.com
- **BODY** Carved quilted-maple top on routed mahogany body
- **NECK** 1-piece, glued-in mahogany, medium-C profile
- **FINGERBOARD**: Ebony, 12" radius, 25" scale length
- **FRETS** 22 medium nickel-silver
- **NUT** Bone, 1 11/16"/43mm
- **PICKUPS** Two Electric City/Artinger Liberator humbuckers
- **ELECTRONICS** Master Volume, master Tone, three-way toggle, mini-switches for series/split/parallel for each pickup
- **FINISH** Tiger-eye top with honey back
- **HARDWARE** Gotoh Delta Series tuners, tune-o-matic bridge, and locking stopbar tailpiece
- **STRINGS** D'Addario 0.010–0.046



The pickups on this guitar come from one of Artinger's fellow Pennsylvanians, a lesser-known winder by the name of Electric City, which now also makes Johnny Hiland's Artist Series pickups, and is beginning to gain some wider attention. The control complement through which they are wired retains admirable simplicity while still offering a lot of versatility: master volume and tone controls and a three-way toggle switch are joined by three-way mini-toggles for each pickup, which yield both coils in series (standard humbucking), split coils (single-coil mode), and full-in-parallel (a funkier, softer humbucker). I was glad to find there's no out-of-phase switch here, though, as that sound never does much for me. I was also glad to see that, unlike many high-end makers of modern do-it-all electrics, Artinger hasn't loaded the guitar with high-octane humbuckers. Rather, this custom set, made exclusively for Artinger by Electric City, measures 8.27k ohms in the bridge position and 7.53k in the neck, pretty much in the ballpark for vintage PAF specs.

Pushing Air

Played through a modified JTM45-meets-2204-style head and an AC15-inspired combo, the lively 'acousticness' that I noted translates into a little extra sweetness in the Chambered Solid Body's amplified voice. Guitar reviewers are fond of seeking out 'single-note clarity' and 'articulation', but this guitar really wows with its anti-mud characteristics. Its tone is cutting and distinct, yet never harsh, and it can certainly be juicy and rocktastic when you dial either amp in that direction. As such, it pulls off any straight-on, foundational riffs with authority – from ZZ Top to Led Zeppelin, to Free, no problem – but there's definitely an ES-335-like airiness to the Chambered Solid Body's voice that finds it excelling at the contemporary and fusion sounds and styles that Artinger's aims for the model imply. If you need to jump from warm jazz comping on the neck pickup to a roaring hair solo on the bridge pickup at the flick of a selector switch, then to shimmering jangle on the next tune, then to biting faux-twang after that, it's all here, courtesy of the fully cooperative nature of this guitar's constructional foundation and its adaptable switching array. And, I should note, it all has a lot of harmonic texture and alluring sonic depth, too.

The finish on the back, sides, and back of the neck reveals the quality of the mahogany used there

Best of all, perhaps, is that you achieve this chameleon-like flexibility on a guitar that plays as easily as any you're likely to encounter. Put simply, this Artinger just feels entirely high-end in the hands, and that impression is further reinforced by the final touches that can often make such a difference: from the pristine fret work, to the spot-on setup, to the solidity of every component, to the smooth gloss of the finish. With its sharp transition from shoulders to fingerboard across a relatively sharp binding edge, this neck is clearly designed for more of a thumb-behind player than a meat-fisted, wrap-around rock 'n' roller like myself, but that's just fine. The Chambered Solid Body is a remarkably compliant instrument nevertheless, and it is dead easy to point it wherever you want it to go. The post-Brexit pound slump is hitting American guitars pretty hard in the UK, but I think this one lands with an impressive price tag nonetheless, considering how much it delivers, and in genuinely hand-made, no-two-quite-the-same electric guitar at that. Job well done, Matt Artinger, and this is certainly a guitar worthy of any expressive and versatile modern player's consideration.

The Artinger is a semi that's been built with archtop-like craftsmanship, ensuring that it's almost as impressive unplugged as it is blasting through a cranked amp

READER BOARDS

Keeping the switching to a minimum was the aim when **JAMES KIRKUP** started putting this 'board together. Here he talks us through the makeup of his versatile but hard-rockin' tone...

KIT LIST

James Kirkup

- **PEDALS IN ORDER**
  TC Electronic PolyTune, Carl Martin Octa-Switch Mk 3, Jim Dunlop Fuzz Face Mini, Ibanez TS-9 Tube Screamer (Keely-modded), Mooer Ensemble King chorus, TC Electronic Hall Of Fame Mini reverb, TC Electronic Nova Repeater delay, Bright Onion Volume Control, Bright Onion Patchbox (repositions send and return switches)
- **PATCH CABLES**
  George L's angled patch cables (some with slip-on jackets)
- **POWER SUPPLY**
  T-Rex Fuel Tank Classic and Diago Micropower9 (both mounted underneath 'board)
- **PEDALBOARD**
  PedalTrain Classic
- **HEAR IT HERE**
  youtu.be/7NptICabfG8

What inspired this set-up?

"After gigging with my previous band, I decided it was time to do less tap dancing in my new band and improve my overall tone! The Octa-Switch Mk 3 gives multiple options for combinations of effects both before amp input and in the effects loop, so you can get a wide range of sounds from the same set-up. I like how the effects are bypassed if they're not needed – it gives you a much purer sound, and it's very versatile, too. Being in a covers band, I wanted to be able to call on a variety of appropriate sounds for the different songs in our set, without having to do lots of switching. I can go from a dirty dry amp with bags of fuzz to clean amp with ambience at the touch of a button!"

Tell us a little about the journey...

"I did loads of gigs that involved lots of frantic pedal switching and not enough variety of core sounds! That made me decide to go down the switcher route. I looked at various true-bypass units out there, and this one had the thinnest manual! You have eight loops for eight pedals and then eight possible presets. I don't like multi-effects pedals or rack gear, and I like being able to tweak the knobs without menus. I like the old school sound of a Marshall with minimal effects, actually – but you need a few effects to stop it all sounding like AC/DC!"

Is there a pedal you'd like to add?

"I've been thinking about adding a compressor for the clean channel to smooth things out, and avoid the clean sounding way louder than dirty as often dynamics are reversed (I usually play dirty so I want a bit of 'squash')... I still have one spare loop left in the Octa-Switch after all! I also have a huge Morley wah, but that can sit on the floor for now."

What guitars and amps do you use with this board?

"Two HSS Partscaster S-types with maple necks, a Yngwie Malmsteen Strat and a BC Rich Mockingbird. That all goes into a Marshall Silver Jubilee 50-watt 2553 and a 1922 2x12 cab. I used to have two cabs... but nobody ever says turn the volume up nowdays! I've rarely played mic'd up – it's usually blasting with the solo level done by my boost pedal."

What lessons have you learned along the way?

"I've learned that ugrading your 'board is going to be more expensive than you think! I used George L's patch cables for sound quality – it's possibly an improvement, although once any drummer starts who knows if you can hear it! Also, the sockets are very tightly spaced on the Octa-Switch, so they fitted in best.

"I also learned that mini-pedals are great, although they tend to tip over. Also I've had a few switches on them break and when they do, they're not repairable. I also found that sockets often aren't in a great position, so wiring it all up took several attempts. I'm still not happy with using Velcro, some pedals require surgery to properly fit it, and the Octa-Switch has feet and they need removing for the Velcro to attatch. Also using a fuzz means you can't run pedals with buffers before it!"

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SOUNDTRACK OF MY LIFE

Nikolai Fraiture

The Strokes bass player gives *G&B* a tour of his most treasured albums

Last year, The Strokes surprised everyone by releasing their first new music since 2013, but since the release of the three-track *OBLIVIUS* EP, things have gone quiet as the New Yorkers work on album number six. Bassist Nikolai Fraiture hasn't been resting on his laurels, however, stepping up as leader of a new band, Summer Moon, which also features Jane's Addiction's Stephen Perkins on drums. *For more on Summer Moon, visit www.summermoonband.com*

Bob Marley
UPRISING

"I found this LP in my mother's record collection when I was a kid. When I heard the Barrett brothers' use of pocket and space, I immediately felt the rhythm track communicating with the vocals and guitars to form a whole. I understood it better when I studied music later. Every note and rest matters, and that's so apparent on songs like *Bad Card*, and *Pimper's Paradise*."

Nirvana
MTV UNPLUGGED IN NEW YORK

"I bought a bootleg CD titled 'Nirvana Live'. It was an unpolished cut of *Unplugged*. In it, Kurt Cobain has a misstep coming back into the second verse of *Pennyroyal Tea*. The official version edited it out. That was when I realized that a lot more went into making records than just performing well. *The Man Who Sold The World* also introduced me to Bowie's lesser known songs."

Victor Wooten
A SHOW OF HANDS

"My bass teacher, Buddy Booker, recommended this. At the time, I was heavy on driving the bass with a pick and locking in with the drums. Then I heard *Classical Thump*, all these open-hammer-pluck, slap-and-tap techniques and styles opened up the floodgates for what the bass is capable of, or even 'allowed' to do. You can hear his influence on The Strokes' *Evening Sun*."

Jaco Pastorius
THE BIRTHDAY CONCERT

"This was another album that changed the way I perceived the bass. *Continuum* and his interpretation of *Amerika* are great examples of how the bass could at times carry the melody itself, adding a new texture to what was expected of the four-string. The use of the fretless and harmonics added a new dimension to my playing, which can be heard on The Strokes' *Fear Of Sleep*."

Jane's Addiction
RITUAL DE LO HABITUAL

"This hit me at the right moment of curiosity for new music. I saw them live when Flea filled in for Eric Avery. The energy was so raw and insane that I lost all my friends. We all found each other at the end of the show in the back drenched in sweat, having each of us gone on our own adventure. I'm so stoked to be playing with Stephen Perkins in Summer Moon."

Leonard Cohen
SONGS OF LEONARD COHEN

"After hearing *Everybody Knows* in *Pump Up The Volume*, I went out and bought this album. Cohen's music, has a way of infiltrating the fabric of your reality leaving a forever impression. It came full-circle when a woman who worked for him played him my cover of *Hey, That's No Way To Say Goodbye*. He told her it was 'a good one' and that he liked the 'old, raw production'."

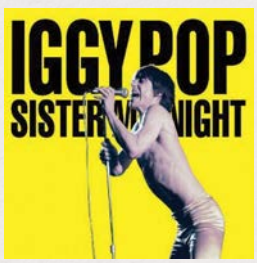
The Velvet Underground
THE BEST OF...

"My brother bought this album for Julian [Casablancas] as a Christmas present when we were 15. We listened to it at his house all the time. I remember playing *Pale Blue Eyes* on repeat on headphones and writing a poem that, for better or worse, became a spoken word piece performed at the end of an early incarnation of the Strokes set at a dive bar in NYC called the Spiral."

David Bowie
THE SINGLES COLLECTION

"When Nirvana covered *The Man Who Sold The World*, I bought this box set. A perfect primer. I've always loved his approach to the recording studio and the stories of him using any available surface to record a sound. I had the pleasure of speaking about his production techniques backstage at a Roseland gig in NYC – he was so gracious and generous about it."

Iggy Pop
SISTER MIDNIGHT



"One of my favorite live albums. I played this constantly at home and on tour. I especially love all the improvisations they do throughout. At the end of *Gimme Danger*, the band, with David Bowie on keyboard and back up vocals, goes into a thrilling self-abusive departure from the original music and lyrics. Pure feeling and raw energy just bursting out of the speakers."

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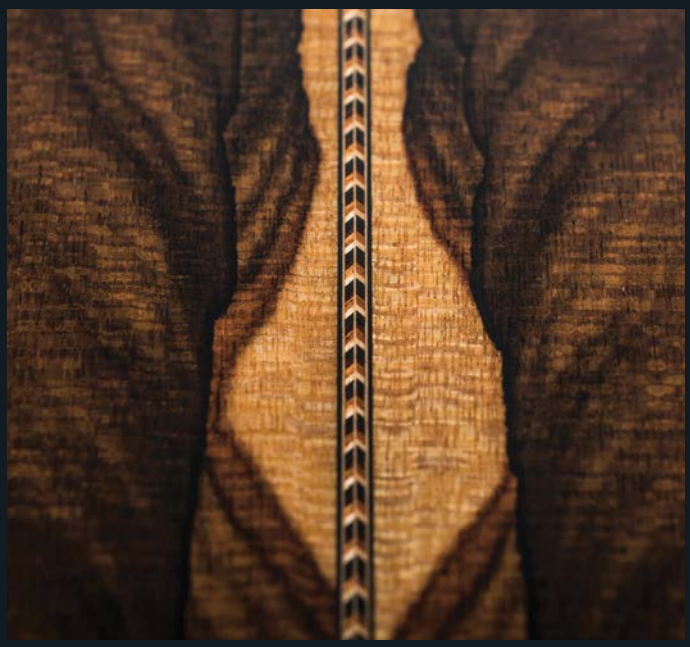
The Money Shot

Sometimes a guitar makes your jaw drop, and this limited edition Bourgeois L-DBO Presentation model does exactly that. Dana Bourgeois has been building guitars for over 40 years now, and he's put every drop of his craftsmanship into this super-luxurious take on Gibson's L-00. Back and sides are made of beautifully figured ziricote, with a striking streak of sapwood up the middle, while the top is aged Adriondack spruce, finished in smoky sunburst. The eye-catcher is the fingerboard, however — the ebony is barely visible thanks to the stunning chunks of corian with abalone snowflakes. With a price five quid shy of £14,000, you'd expect this guitar to be stunning in both tone and playability as well as looks, and you can hear just how good it sounds for yourself – head to bit.ly/TNAGBourgeois to watch our video with The North American Guitar.



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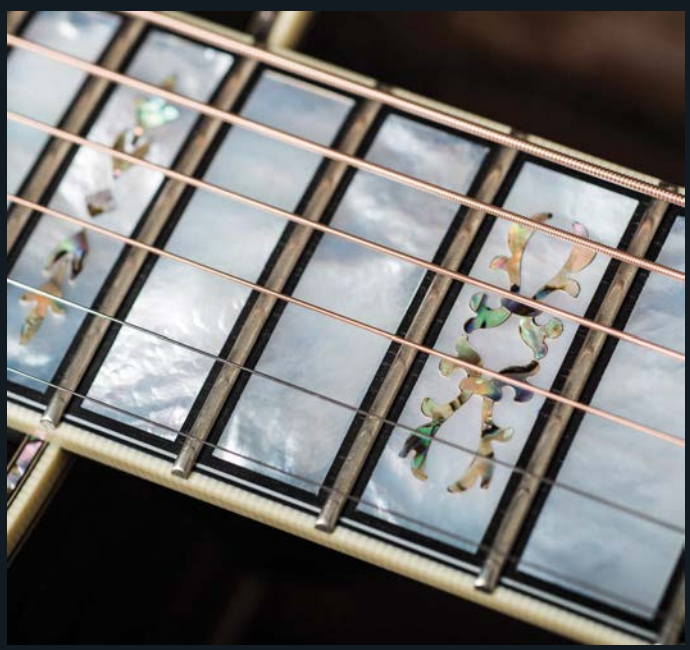

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The Need For TWEED

There's a lot more to tweed amps than the material used to cover their cabinets. It isn't just a finish option – it's a sonic aesthetic, a mindset almost, that can change the way you play and shape your choice of guitar and effects in the process. Once you've gone tweed, you may never go back. It can even make you consider ditching your pedalboard altogether – just ask Joe Bonamassa.

But what's the appeal of these circuits, some of which were designed in California while the sound of air raid sirens and gunfire was still ringing in the ears of musicians in Europe? How on earth can amplifiers invented before the dawn of rock 'n' roll still sound utterly contemporary and inspiring in 2017? Read on to find out, but be warned – these amps go all the way to 12...

Tweed Evolution 20
How Fender built the amps that gave voice to rock 'n' roll

Vintage Shootout 26
Five classic tweed circuits cranked and compared

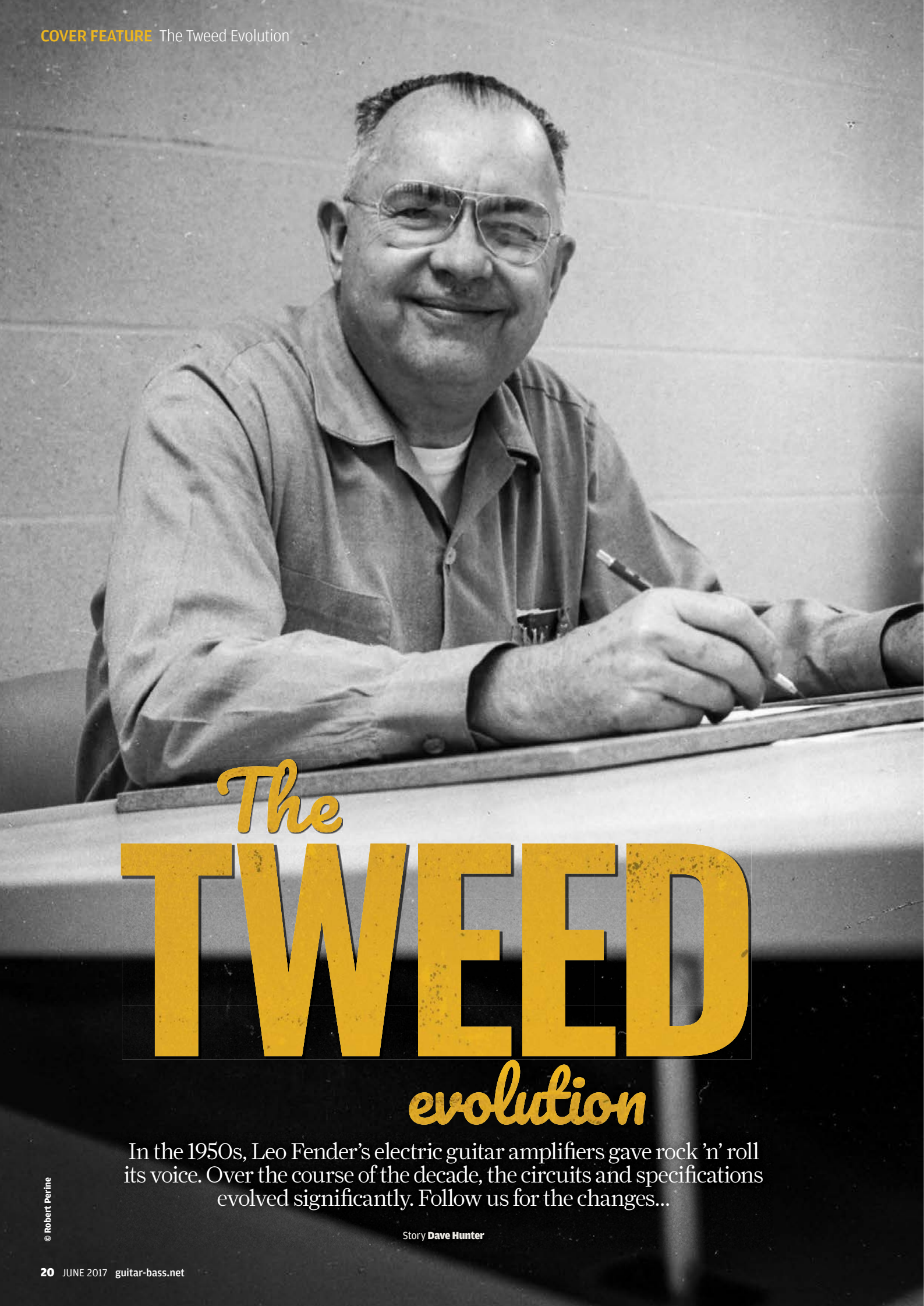
Tweeds In The Wild 38
Top tips for playing live with vintage tweeds

Pedal Pushing 40
Which stomboxes play nice with tweed amps?

California Love 42
Great new tweed-inspired amps you must play

The New Breed 84
Fender's new '57 Custom Pro-Amp reviewed

Digital Tweed 92
Universal Audio's UAD Fender '55 Deluxe plugin on test



The TWEED evolution

In the 1950s, Leo Fender's electric guitar amplifiers gave rock 'n' roll its voice. Over the course of the decade, the circuits and specifications evolved significantly. Follow us for the changes...

Story **Dave Hunter**

© Robert Perine

The words 'tweed amp' might rightly refer to any of a number of different vintage creations, but mention them to a fellow guitarist and they are likely to evoke one image first and foremost: a road-worn Fender combo of the 1950s, covered in lacquered aircraft-luggage linen. Right alongside this vision, the mind's ear is likely to conjure the ghost of a sound – warm, thick, sweet, slightly raw-edged in a delicious way – while the fingers itch for a compellingly tactile playing feel.

Collectible, delectable, and superbly playable, Fender's tweed amps of the 1950s are not only enduring classics, but remain relevant tone tools today. Dig deeper, however, and there's a great variation in the fine points of what 'tweed' really means. Let's parse the details to find out how Fender's formative combos evolved from archaic 'electrified suitcases' to circuits and designs that still contribute their DNA to some of today's most popular current valve amps.

Swingin' Woodies

Leo Fender built his first amplifiers to suit the needs of Western swing players working the busy circuit in Southern California. After honing his chops for several years turning out one-off amps and portable PA systems from the workshop in the back of his Fender's Radio Service shop in Fullerton, Leo partnered with guitarist and inventor Doc Kauffman to manufacture the K&F line of lap-steel guitars and amps from 1945 to early 1946, when Kauffman jumped ship. These early combos, in their dull crinkle-finish cabinets, followed standard-issue amplification circuits published by the valve manufacturers, and differ little from the earliest electric-guitar amps of a decade before.

The first actual Fender amps, produced from around mid-1946, might have looked equally antique, but they were also considerably more stylish, in their spiffy maple, mahogany, and black walnut hardwood cabinets, with coloured grille cloth and protective metal 'racing stripes'. These amps also introduced, all those years ago, three enduring Fender model names: Princeton, Deluxe (aka Model 26), and Professional (soon shortened to 'Pro'). All had top-mounted chassis with rear-facing control panels, with just a single volume control on the 1x8 Princeton, separate instrument volume and mic volume and a shared tone control on the 1x10 Deluxe and 1x15 Professional. The so-called 'Woodies' were equally short-lived, however, and just a year after their introduction the range would receive another major make-over.

V-Fronts & Fledgling Tweed

Early in 1947, Fender made a huge leap forward in both styling and circuitry with an amp that was resolutely ahead of its time: the Dual Professional. The name says it all.

The first Fender amps, from mid-1946, had hardwood cabinets with coloured grille cloths and metal 'racing stripes'

Following the archaic early K&F and 'Woody' amps, this was the young maker's first jump up into the truly professional amp league, and it was also the world's first production amplifier with two speakers, a pair of 10-inch Jensens in split baffles mounted at reflex angles in a V-front cabinet for wide sound dispersal. It was Dual, it was Professional... and back in early 1947, your aspiring steel- or electric-Spanish guitarist couldn't ask for much more.

The Dual Professional was also arguably the first guitar product into the world of professional-level manufacture, which would pave the way for the industry throughout the second half of the century. In addition to the major 'firsts' listed above, it was also among one of the first amps to feature a top-mounted control panel; the first Fender to offer easy access of the inside of the chassis through a removable back panel, the first Fender amp to be made with a circuit board (a rarity among makers in general at the time, when point-to-point 'rat's nest' wiring still proliferated), the first to be covered in the enduring and popular tweed (though a whiter, more linen-like variety than the more familiar two-tone tweed to come), and the first to carry a tube chart; and – as John Teagle and John Sprung point out in their excellent book, *Fender Amps: The First Fifty Years* – was the first Fender amp to be built in a finger-jointed cabinet. At this point, we see Leo Fender labouring to meet several admirable goals, striving to make the amps rugged and roadworthy, easy to repair, and straightforward to assemble (and therefore, relatively affordable as well) – in addition to sounding great, of course.

Circuit-wise, the V-front Dual Professional was still a long way from the better-known tweed amps that Fender would produce a decade later, or even a few years later, but surviving examples that are in good shape are known to sound extremely good, with a surprisingly crisp clean tone up to about noon (with a single coil-equipped guitar injected), and a thick, creamy, woody overdrive beyond that. Such characteristics might be partly owed to its use of two 6SJ7 pentode preamp tubes, and although they might rightly to have contributed to the first real example of 'tweed tone,' they were only ever used in Fender amps for an extremely short while. Later in 1947 the Dual Professional was dropped, and its general format taken over by the new Super-Amp, which would endure as Fender's 2x10 combo until the 'blackface' era more than 15 years later.

From TV-Fronts To Wide Panels

While changing the Dual Professional to the Super-Amp, Fender busted out an entirely >

new tweed look for the full range, which now included five combos, from the four-watt 1x6 Champion (soon Champ) to the 20-watt 1x15 Pro Amp. Circuits mostly echoed that of the Super, with 6SC7 octal preamp tubes, followed by cathode-biased output stages with 6L6s in the Pro and Super, and 6V6s in the Champion, Princeton and Deluxe. The look of the tweed changed somewhat, too. Although the familiar fabric pattern would ultimately take over the line in 1949, the first tweed Fender used sported diagonal yellow and brown stripes.

Lower operating voltages, inefficient output tubes and transformers, and cathode biasing all contributed to less powerful 6L6-based amps than we're used to today, when a pair of 6L6GCs commonly delivers 40 to 50 watts, but these TV-front combos sound surprisingly good when maintained properly, with levels of detail and clarity that often surprise players expecting 'warm' and 'woolly', and a juicy, saturated overdrive tone when turned up. They do compress severely with volume advanced much past noon, however, and their headroom is rather compromised, too – think archetypal blues wailer when pushed hard, or seminal rock 'n' roll when dialed back just a little.

> Early tweed amps compress severely with the volume much past noon – think blues wailer or seminal rock 'n' roll

Leo would continue to push for improved clean volume, as well as greater control of his amps' EQ stages, and these would remain the dual design objectives for several years to come, taking root in almost every alteration introduced over the next 12 years. Before revamping the range yet again, he achieved a goodly dollop of these features in the new 2x12 Twin-Amp, developed in late-1952 and put into production in early '53.

In addition to making more efficient use of the 6L6GC's potential to generate something closer to 30 watts, the amp also had a more comprehensive tone stage than Fender had previously used, with separate treble and bass controls.

Meanwhile, Fender had also introduced its first Bassman amplifier in 1952, to accompany the Precision Bass unveiled in 1951. Very different from other Fender amps of the time, it had a chassis mounted in the bottom of the combo cab with an umbilical cord extending to a top control panel with volume and tone knobs, a 15-inch Jensen speaker, and a semi-closed back with two

A 1950 V-front Super, with distinctive metal protective strip, and the rare 6V6-loaded '56 Super. Above right: a '53 'wide-panel' Deluxe

round ports at the centre. It was also very different from the tweed Bassman as we would come to know it – but a significant first step in helping Fender discover what he didn't want his bass amps to sound like!

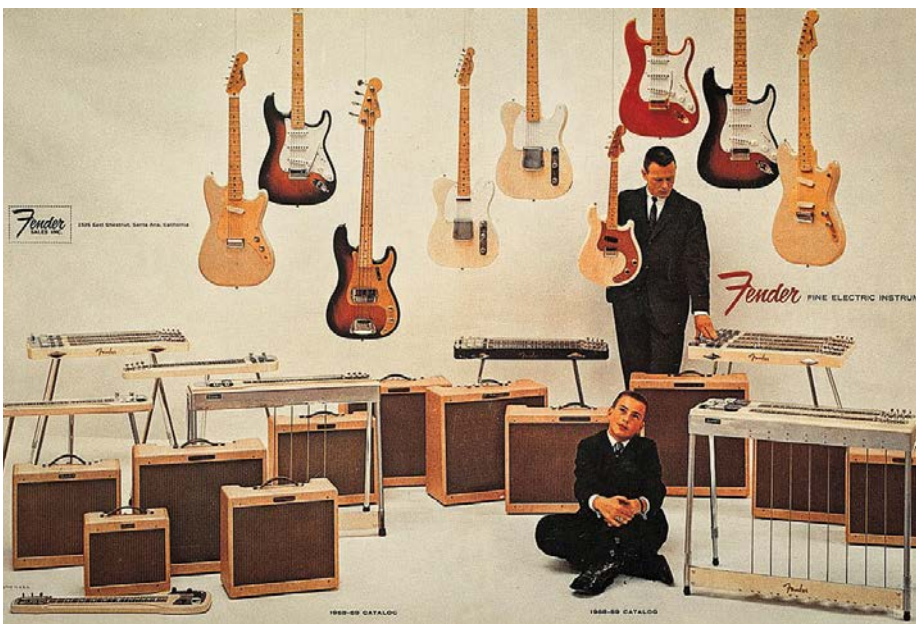
Narrow Panels & Refined Circuits

In 1955 the entire Fender amp line-up transmuted into the look that defines 'tweed' for the majority of players. Along the way, Leo and co continued to refine the circuits, too, meaning that the new combos not only looked different, but their sound was closer to the stated design goals. The new 'narrow-panel' cabs were dubbed for the narrower top and bottom front panels to which their speaker baffles were affixed. Attachment with just two screws per panel (ie, four in total) in the small to medium amps and three in the larger amps left a lot of baffle area to freely vibrate, creating the so-called 'floating baffle' that contributes a singing, woody resonance that is part of the tweed mystique. Rather than the brown linen grille cloth of the TV-front and wide-panel amps, narrow-panel amps were covered in a new synthetic-thread material that was more resistant, while also passing sound with less obstruction. Excellent Jensen alnico speakers were used, too, enhancing the amps' crisp, detailed presentation.

One key element of this new wave of amps was that separate treble and bass controls were eventually included on all combos larger than the Deluxe. In 1957, a middle control was even added to the Bassman, now equipped with 4x10 speakers to better handle the low end (although also making it, as many were discovering, a killer guitar amp). For a time this was Fender's most powerful amp at around 45 watts, compared to the 28- to 35-watt ratings of the Pro, Super, Bandmaster, and (low-powered) Twin. A year later, however, the Twin took over in the wattage stakes when a full quartet of 6L6s enabled a whopping 80-watt output, making it one of the most powerful guitar amplifiers available. The Twin also adopted the middle control.

Key Circuit Features

By the late 50s Fender amps had evolved to the best-loved tweed specifications, while personifying some of the most advanced >



By the time the tweed line-up had reached its apex, there were plenty of flavours to sample from the development-packed years of its evolution

By the end of the decade, the tweed recipe was fully formed, as this Deluxe from 1959 attests

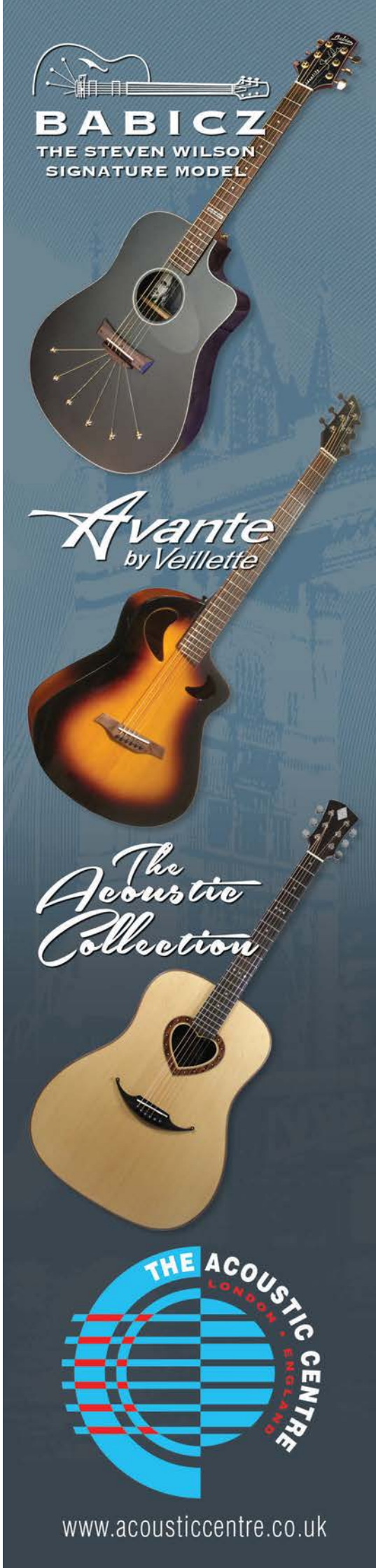
circuit design and build quality of their day. Rather than piling on extras such as tremolo and reverb – several makers had added the former before Fender's Tremolux debuted in 1955, and the latter didn't come to a Fullerton combo until early 1963 – Leo and company concentrated on revising circuits toward optimal sonic performance and greater volume, while also making every effort to build roadworthy professional amps. As such, they were winning over players in droves little more than a decade into the company's existence, becoming market leaders even without all the bells and whistles.

One of the key features of the 6L6-based tweeds of the late 1950s is the cathode-follower tone stack. As used in the Super, Pro, Twin, Bandmaster and Bassman, this circuit uses a full preamp tube, with one triode as a gain stage and the other as a cathode-follower, driving the tone capacitors and potentiometers that follow it. (In a cathode-follower, the signal exits the tube's cathode rather than its plate connection, making it more of a 'voltage conditioner' or buffer – roughly put – than a gain stage.) The result is a very interactive tone network that also enhances the tactile playing feel of the amp. It's worth noting that the much-lauded Vox Top Boost circuit is just another form of cathode-follower tone circuit, and differs from the Fender circuit by only a few minor component changes.

Also a formative factor to the sound and feel of different amps within the line-up was the type of phase inverter Fender used for each, a part of the circuit that usually isn't given much consideration from a sonic perspective. In everything smaller than the Bassman and high-powered Twin (other than the single-ended Champ and Princeton, which have no phase inverter), Fender used a cathodyne (aka 'split-load') phase inverter. This design uses one side of a 12AX7 to drive the signal, and the other to split it into two strands, with one departing the cathode and the other, in reverse-phase, departing the plate. Aside from performing its phase-splitting duties, this configuration is known to distort somewhat in and of itself when hit with heavy playing at volume, contributing compression and tube breakup to that which also occurs in the preamp and output stages.

The bigger Twin and Bassman, however, were given a robust long-tailed-pair inverter, a more advanced configuration that passes a more linear signal from the preamp to the output tubes, while itself compressing and distorting less than did earlier types of inverters. The result is heard in both improved fidelity and headroom, key characteristics of those bigger Fender tweeds.

By the time the tweed line-up had reached its apex there were plenty of flavours to sample from the 12 development-packed years of its evolution. All stops along the way have their fans, and their applications; sample what you can of the rich pageant of tweed tone and see what works best for you.



See the video! youtube.com/theguitarmagazine

Vintage TWEED shootout

We all know there's something special about Fender's 1950s amps, but what does that mean, really? There's only one way to find out – *G&B*'s panel of experts got in a room with five real world examples of Fullerton's finest and started playing...

Story **Huw Price** Photography **Eleanor Jane.**

We regularly feature vintage guitars in *G&B*, but for most of us, even refinished examples are priced beyond what we can afford or justify paying. There's a common perception that 1950s Fender amplifiers fall into the same bracket, and indeed some do, but if you start looking seriously at vintage tweeds you might be pleasantly surprised. In many cases, a 1950s Fender amp is a far more realistic prospect than a 1950s Fender guitar.

A big reason for this discrepancy is that collectors always want clean and original examples. Re-tweeding has no negative impact on tone and sympathetic restoration and modifications may actually improve it, but both have a significant negative impact on value. The upshot is that you can still find fairly original examples in the same price range as current production US-made boutique amps. If you're prepared to consider re-tweeds, replaced transformers, speakers and so forth, you may even find amps that are cheaper than many of the hand-built clones and official reissues.

With that in mind, we assembled a group of vintage tweed amps that you can expect to find for between around £1,500 and £2,500 on Reverb or eBay, and a team of experts to assess them: *G&B* head honcho, Chris Vinnicombe, senior product specialist, Huw Price, and function band guitarist and tonehound, Ed Oleszko.

We should stress that these are all 'real world' examples that see regular use – most are restoration projects and you might remember some from past Workshop features in the mag. None retain their original speakers, most have had a transformer replaced and electronic components have been changed where necessary to keep them running reliably. Since they were made for the US market, all require a 110-volt step down transformer and three-prong plugs with chassis ground connections have been fitted for safety. >

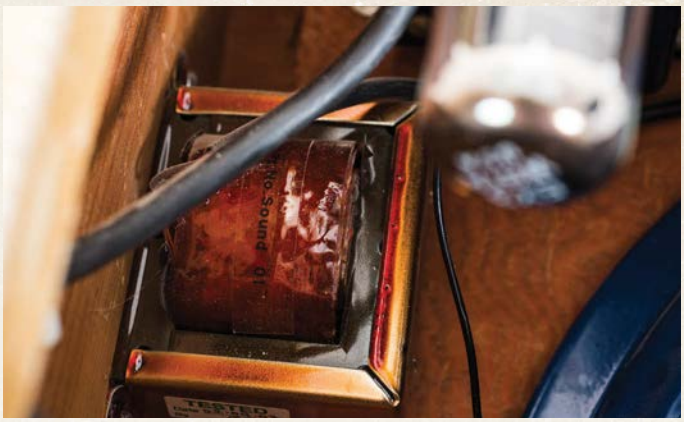
FENDER
FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA
Fender Bassman
Fender Vibrolux
FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA
Fender Super-Amp
FULLERTON, CALIFORNIA

Telly addict These amps were known as 'TV Front' Deluxes – so called because the speaker cut-out resembled an old-fashioned TV screen

The resistance While the capacitors coupling the input to the grids of V1 are original paper/foil units, the rest have been modded to Mallory 150s

Blue note The original Jensen speaker has been replaced with a Celestion Blue

Mic check The inputs on this have been modded to V-front Super specs by putting the bright capacitor on the mic channel



1951 5A3 'TV Front' Deluxe

The first cab off our rank is fittingly the earliest model we're looking at today – a 'TV Front' Deluxe from 1951. The 'TV Front' designation comes from the speaker cut out's resemblance to the shape of early television screens, and when Lupe Lopez soldered this one, Fender was still using large octal preamp valves. They mixed and matched depending on availability and this example has two 6SL7s, but 6SN7s are common, too.

It has five-meg resistors between the grid and the cathode, which is wired direct to ground. It's a method known as grid leak biasing and it regulates plate current by 'trapping' electrons on the grid to keep it negatively charged. Octal preamp valves biased this way are generally considered to produce a fatter, smoother and more compressed tone than smaller nine-pin preamp valves biased with a cathode resistor and a bypass capacitor.

6SL7s have a gain factor of around 80, which compares to 45 and 100 for 12AY7s and 12AX7s respectively. Chris Fontana from Rift Amps, who makes a mean take on the 5A3 himself, points out that since nine-pin valves in guitar amps generally run at 60 to 75 per cent, more gain is produced by the 5A3's preamp than the '59 5E3 we'll be looking at the end of this shootout.

Although the cabinet design and other minor details changed for the 'wide panel' 5B3, 5C3 and 5D3, Fender retained the same basic circuit. The 5C3 saw nine-pin preamp valves arrive and negative feedback was only used in that circuit, but every Deluxe model prior to the 5E3 had a paraphase inverter before the 6V6 power valves.

This 5A3 was fitted with a Celestion Blue many years ago, but the original Jensen P12R is in decent shape and produces an authentically raw, fizzy and boxy early tweed tone, but it's packed away for posterity because compared to the Blue it's muddy, inefficient and doesn't sound as good. The output transformer was originally screwed onto the speaker itself, but the replacement has been mounted onto the side of the cabinet instead.

High-wattage wire-wound resistors have replaced the tired originals in the power supply and there are also new 220K plate resistors. Both capacitors coupling the input jack to the grids of V1 are the original paper/foils but all the other capacitors are Mallory 150s. The inputs have also been reconfigured to V-front Super specs by putting the bright capacitor on the mic channel. With no grid resistors between the input and the grid, there's extra brightness, volume and grind.

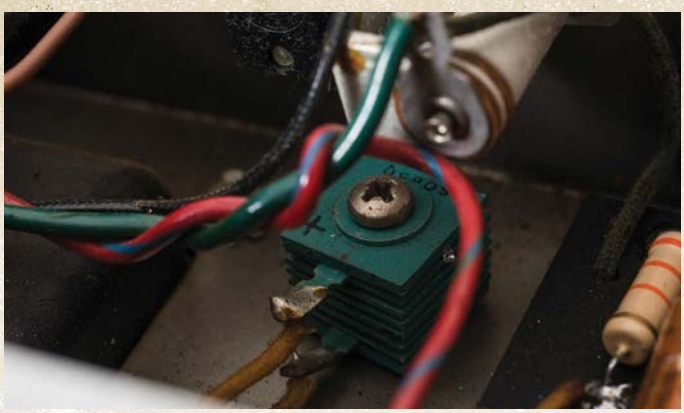
CHRIS *"At this point, Leo Fender was on a journey responding to requests from musicians – mainly Western swing and country players who wanted loud and clear amps. They are the opposite qualities we look for in tweed amps these days and they have such glorious overdriven tones. With the Blue's extra efficiency, you have access to a whole palette of sounds. It astonishes me that nobody really thought to use these drive tones until the mid-1960s. I think if you put this 5A3 up against a stock original, it would blow it away."*

ED *"The 5A3 with the Blue achieves the perfect balance between the power valves, the output transformer and speaker power handling. The Blue is in its comfort zone here, whereas with the 5E3, it's right on the edge and you can hear it splutter when it's really pushed. But a lot of people will like that for a Neil Young-type sound and you can get there even quicker with a vintage Jensen. The 5A3 has wonderful natural compression, but interestingly it's mostly confined to the midrange, with the bass and treble hardly compressed at all."*

HUW *"I really like the horn-like bark you get with semi-clean tones. It's a real old-school jazz thing. Comparing the Deluxes, the 5A3's softer bass response is much like the V-front Super we tested a while back. I suspect it has more to do with the way the power valves and phase inverter are configured than the cabinet design. To my ears the shifting harmonic overtones of this amp are fascinating and the phenomenon isn't guitar-dependant. It seems to give more sustain, too, with a very smooth breakup characteristic that's less aggressive than the others. I also like the way it compresses when you dig in and gels notes together."*

KEY FEATURES

- **MODEL** 5A3 Deluxe
- **YEAR OF MANUFACTURE** 1951
- **POWER** 12W
- **VALVES** 2x 6SL7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3
- **SPEAKER** Celestion Blue
- **KEY MODS** Speaker swap, microphone input routed through bright capacitor



1956 5E11 Vibrolux

You may remember our restoration of this very amp in 2015, and the process highlighted some interesting things about the circuit. The 'Lux was the first Fender amp with built-in tremolo and it's often described as a tweed Harvard with added tremolo. V1 is different, along with a few components, but it's a good starting point because Steve Cropper used a Harvard on countless Stax hits.

The similarities between the Vibrolux and the brownface Princeton are perhaps of greater significance. Fender beefed up the filtering and the voltages for the Princeton and reconfigured the odd Vibrolux input configuration, but you can trace the lineage all the way through to the blackface Princeton Reverb.

This particular example has been re-tweeded at least twice, but the cabinet is in great shape and the tube chart survives intact. The Vibrolux came with a 10-inch Jenson alnico speaker but this one has a Celestion Blue 12-inch mounted on a new baffle. At some point the Triad #108 output transformer was replaced, but the 125A1A transformer that was installed was standard issue in the Vibrolux from mid-1959 onwards and it was subsequently used in 60s Princetons and Deluxes.

All the surviving Astron capacitors in this amp tested leaky when we were restoring it, so Tube Amp Doctor paper/oils replaced those in the signal path, with Mallory 150s in the tremolo circuit. After the refurb, breakup was smoother, sustain improved and the tremolo now sounds much stronger. Special attention was also paid to the working voltages, with the preamp judged to sound best with lower, tweed-era voltages, while the power amp preferred slightly higher, more brownface voltages.

With the stock inputs, you end up with no ground reference resistor for the grid of V1 and instead the guitar's volume pot provides the ground reference. Some have described this as a design error, but this was fixed by soldering a resistor between the positive of input 1 and ground. You can try various values but online amp guru Uncle Doug recommends 100K or 220K. We also installed a negative feedback cut switch.

CHRIS *"First off, it definitely has a better tremolo than all the other amps on test! The transient response is much faster than the 5A3's and it's far less compressed. It depends on what you like as a player but the extra choppiness of the Vibrolux is very cool. I also think players who have primarily played amps with blackface-type tone circuits might bond quicker with this than either of the Deluxes."*

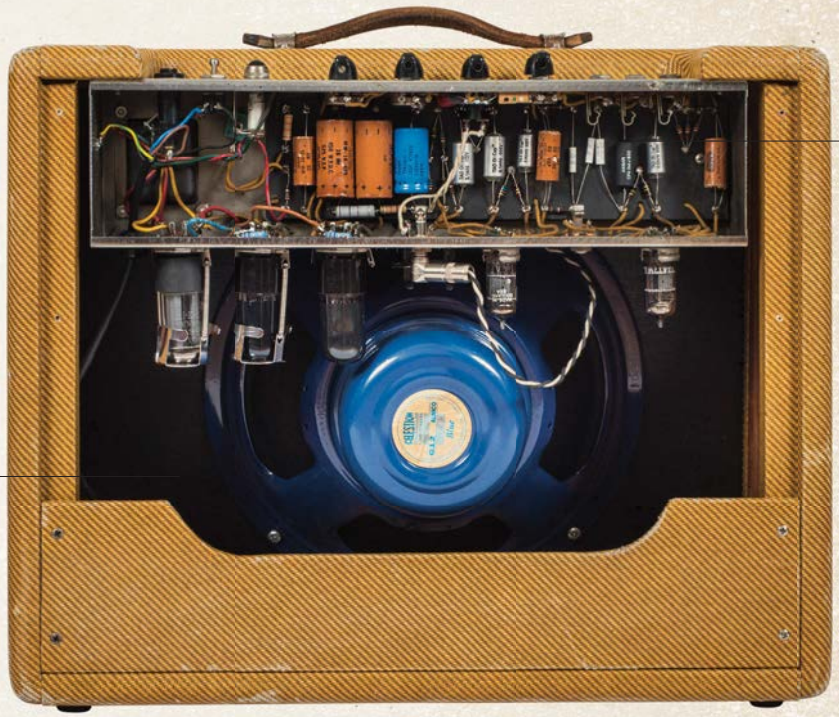
ED *"In its natural state, with a 10-inch Jensen speaker, this amp was slightly weak and underwhelming. It also sounded a bit polite, but since we've modded it, the sound is closer to a 5E3, but not quite as ragged or lively. The Vibrolux has always seemed to me like a smaller version of the big tweeds rather than it's own thing, whereas both Deluxes do their own thing. Even when we tried it with cathode bias instead of fixed bias, the Vibrolux certainly isn't just a 5E3 with trem."*

HUW *"I find the breakup sounds a bit rougher with this amp, but the negative feedback lift was a huge improvement because it opens out the top end, makes it clearer, more dynamic and a lot more exciting. Compared to the 5A3, and particularly the 5E3, it has noticeably less bass, but the midrange is really strong. I particularly enjoyed the Vibrolux when playing clean rhythm parts with a Telecaster and with overdrive and trem it's the swampiest, moodiest and most atmospheric amp for playing bottleneck styles."*

KEY FEATURES

- **MODEL** 5E11 Vibrolux
- **YEAR OF MANUFACTURE** 1956
- **POWER** 10W (closer to 16W modded)
- **VALVES** 2x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3
- **SPEAKER** Celestion Blue
- **KEY MODS** Speaker & baffle swap, added ground reference resistor on input 1, negative feedback defeat switch, later Princeton-style output transformer

Smokin' tweed As is often the case with vintage Fender amps, this Vibrolux has been re-tweeded at least twice

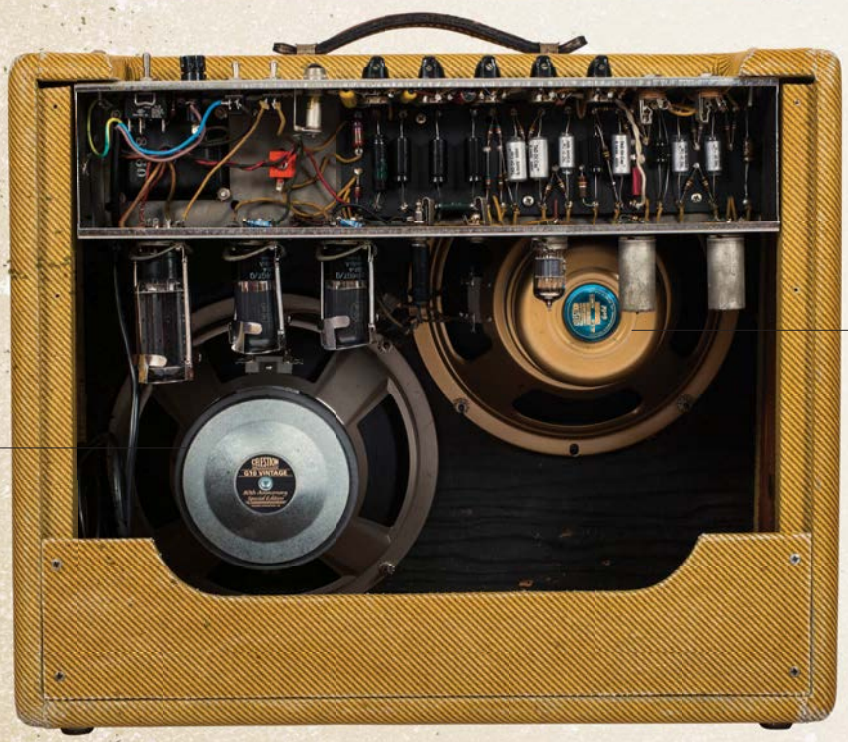


Bust a cap Original VIbroluxes used the guitar's volume pot for ground reference, but we've added a ground reference resistor between the positive of input 1 and ground

Blue moon Once again, the original Jensen has been swapped out for a beefier Celestion Blue unit

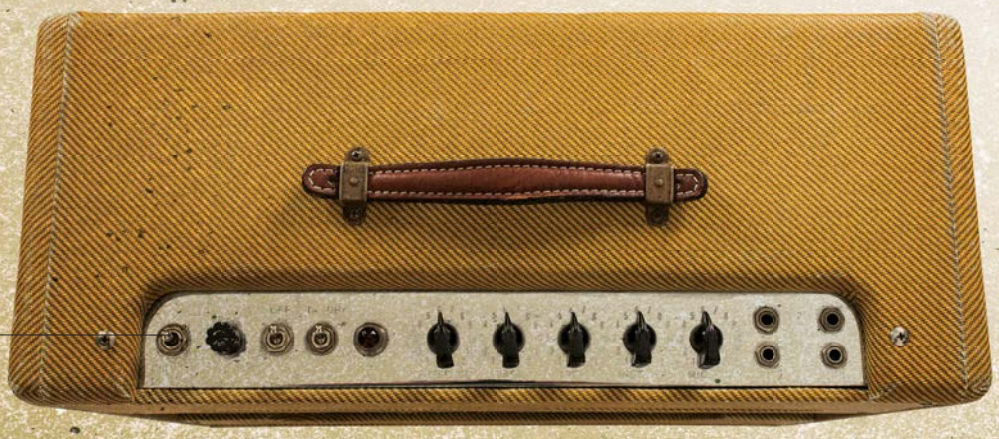
Wobble onboard The Vibrolux is the first Fender amp with tremolo built in

Aged to perfection Like many of the other amps here, this one has been re-tweeded, but lightly relic'd to give it a played-in look

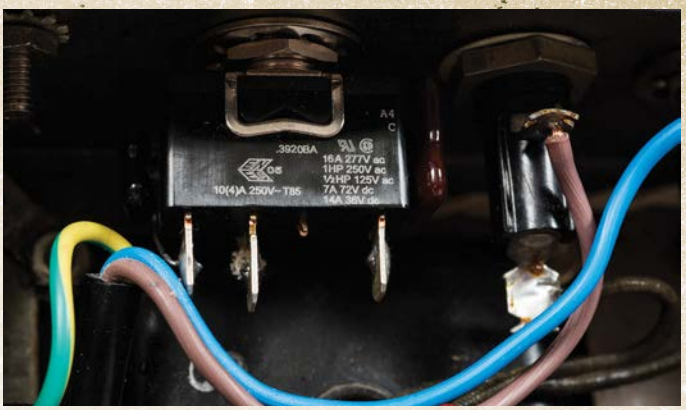


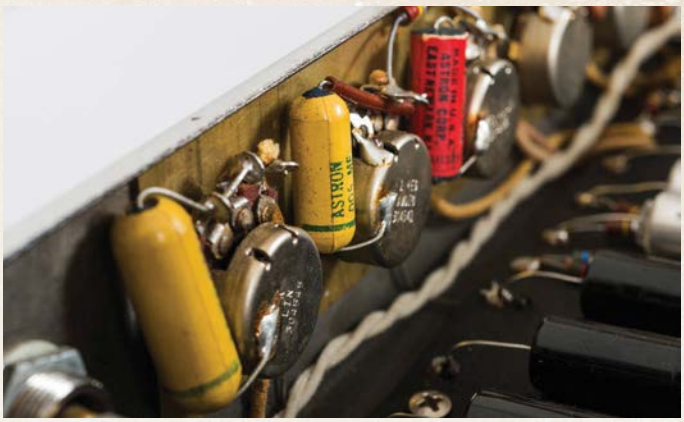
Gold standard One of the original Jensen speakers has been replaced with a Celestion G10 Gold

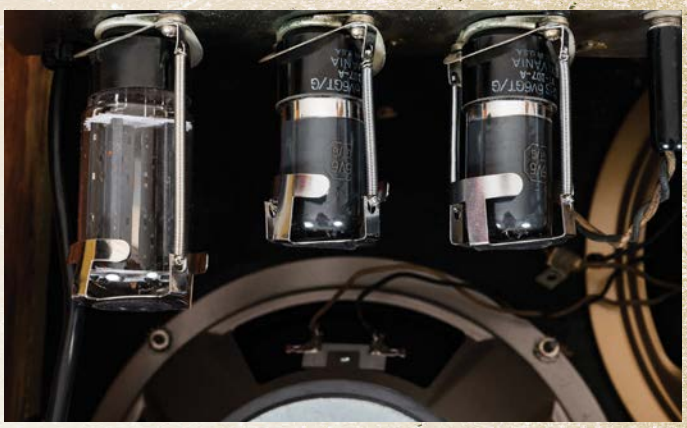
Vintage? Correct The other Jensen P10 original was also replaced, this time for a Celestion Vintage 10



In the middle This amp has been modded with a three-way midrange toggle in place of the ground switch







1956 5E4-A Super

Although Fender produced Super models throughout the tweed era, this is the rarest amp in the round-up. From its V-fronted beginnings, the Super was a step up from the Deluxe in size and power, with two 10-inch speakers and a pair of 6L6 power valves. However for a brief period, beginning around early 1956, Supers had fixed-bias 6V6s.

With power dropping from about 30 to 22 watts, the 6V6 Super had two model designations – the 5E4 and 5E4-A. This amp lived in Nashville, where it was a much-used studio amp. Although similar in power to the Deluxes and the Vibrolux, the Super has a very different tone stack. The single tone control is replaced by a Baxandall-type equalizer with bass and treble, plus a presence. It also features, in slightly altered form, on our Bassman on page 34. Fender continued using this type of tone stack from the early 60s – it's characterized by a pre-set midrange scoop, which contrasts with the fat midrange of single-tone tweeds.

This amp is Ed's, and again it's a re-tweed, but the cab has been lacquered and relic'd. Tube Amp Doctor paper/oil capacitors replace leaky Astrons and the bias and filter electrolytics were renewed. The bias resistors were also tweaked to bring voltages into line, and power supply resistors were swapped to high-wattage wire-wounds.

Once these tweed amps are made safe with a chassis-earthed mains cable, any ground lift switches become redundant. This provides opportunities for sympathetic and reversible modifications and a three-way midrange switch was added here. Placing a 500pF or 1000pF capacitor in parallel with the 250pF capacitor connected to the treble control provides two preset levels of mid boost and a stock factory setting with the switch in the centre (off) position.

Although the amp was purchased with two original but re-coned Jensen P10 alnico speakers, they only sounded good with clean and lightly driven levels. When pushed hard they became harsh and raspy, so they were replaced with a Celestion G10 Gold and a Celestion Vintage 10.

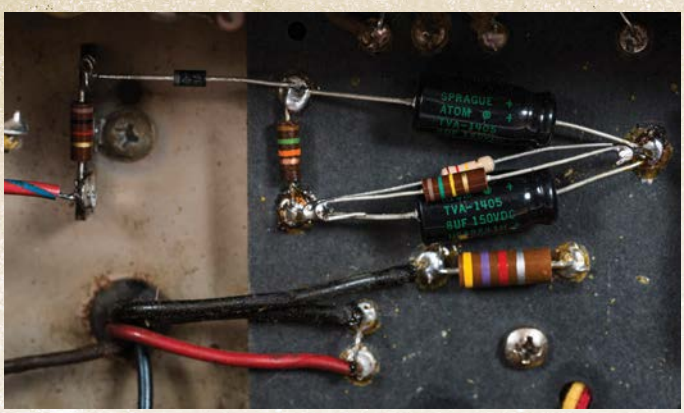
CHRIS *"Of all the amps this one has the lowest noise floor by some distance. It's also an amp for bigger stages because it has more spread and you could use it at gigs where the 5A3 and even the 5E3 would get a bit lost. It just sounds so good but it's also the hardest one to get hold of. It's certainly one of the nicest clean sounds you could ever have, but then it's one of the best overdrive tones, too. You get all the great tweed drive tones, but you can also get cleans that could give any blackface a kicking – all in one box. It's a room-filling sound that doesn't hurt your ears – I really struggle to find a down side."*

ED *"The midrange mod is like having a mid control with three pre-set positions. The circuit itself, in conjunction with the 10-inch speakers, produces a very noticeable mid scoop, but it still has a warm, vocal quality. When it distorts, the mid compression gives it a heavy tone, but it still has an uncompressed sparkle in the treble that retains string definition and touch. It's like a 5A3 on steroids, but with less boxiness and a bigger sound thanks to the two speakers. Much of that character was there with the original Jensens, but the bandwidth was narrower. For jangle you need to run it with the stock circuit, but for general playing it's best with the mid-boost engaged."*

HUW *"This is by far and away the most versatile amp of the lot. The range of tones and gain levels is phenomenal. When you boost the treble and bass and plug into the lower level input it feels like you're playing a Princeton-type circuit and it makes a Gibson ES-330 jangle and sparkle. Then you can go in a ZZ Top direction, with seriously heavy overdrive. It's like the best of both worlds because you have fast transient attack coupled with compression that's a bit like the 5A3, but without such a pronounced ultra high harmonic bloom. Breakup is way smoother than the Vibrolux and the 5E3, despite having fixed bias. It interfaces with every guitar really well, its cleanup ability is the best of the bunch and the bottom end always holds together. The Super was reputedly Leo Fender's favourite amp and I can understand why. I think it's simply a better amp than the Vibrolux and the 5E3."*

KEY FEATURES

- **MODEL** 5E4-A Super
- **YEAR OF MANUFACTURE** 1956
- **POWER** 22W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AY7, 2x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5U4G
- **SPEAKER** Celestion Gold 10" & Celestion Vintage 10
- **KEY MODS** Speaker swap, 3-way midrange switch in place of ground switch



1959 5F6-A Bassman

For some this is the ultimate tweed amp and clean originals have sold for eye-watering sums. However, this one cost about the same as a brand new Tone King, Swart or Carr amp because it came in a Mojo reissue cabinet with a set of four 10-inch Weber alnico speakers. It's the one we lacquered and relic'd for a Workshop feature in *Guitar & Bass* last year and the original parts are the chassis and fittings, the transformers and choke, the pots, hardware and knobs.

The black vulcanised fibreboard material that was used for tweed circuit boards can sometimes leak current. This happens because carbon is used to get the colour, and carbon conducts electricity. In this case, somebody had carefully transferred all the original components to a hand-made fibreglass board, but subsequently a new circuit board was assembled using carbon composite resistors and orange drop capacitors.

The amp arrived in good working condition but it was decided to upgrade the 'board with more period-correct signal capacitors. Yellow Jupiters were selected and mounted in early 50s-style cardboard tubes for the sheer fun of it. The selenium diode in the bias circuit was bypassed with a modern diode, which is advisable for any old tweed amps that sport an original diode. You can leave selenium diodes in situ to preserve the look if you wish.

Having experimented with 6L6 and 5881 power valves and chosen 6L6s, the fixed-bias resistor was tweaked accordingly. Following Joe Bonamassa's example, the original Weber Alnicos were sold off to fund a set of three Celestion Vintage 10s. Joe keeps an old Jensen tucked up in the top left corner, because a Vintage 10 simply won't fit in the available space. However, we established that while a Vintage 10 won't fit, a Celestion Gold can just about be squeezed in, and so the Jensen was quickly removed.

CHRIS *"This amp's tone is instantly recognisable and when you hear it in a room it's like the sound you've heard countless times before on hit records that span the decades. It's a completely different animal to the others in many ways. After playing the other tweeds, you can tell you're on the cusp of blackface. It's like two steps further on the evolutionary scale from the Super and with the four speakers, large cabinet and massive transformers, everything sounds big and clear."*

ED *"Even when you're playing clean there's an across the board compression rather than the midrange focused squash that you get from most of the other tweeds. That makes playing it incredibly addictive, although the cleans aren't as sweet as the Super or the 5A3. When you wind it up with a Les Paul it's Clapton on Beano, clean with a Strat it's just like Jimi... and you can hear that SRV tautness, too. Even though it has a set of 6L6s that sound as close as possible to 6V6s, you still get a piano-like bass and beautifully glassy highs. It's the clearest sounding of all these amps and when I play through one, my bandmates often notice licks for the first time, even when I've been playing them for years. Despite the sheer volume, it's still incredibly versatile and you can go from the prettiest cleans to overdrive that just roars."*

HUW *"To my ears, this comes closest to the 5A3 with the upper harmonic sparkle but it also has a distinct and beautiful upper midrange chime. You get a hint of that with classic Marshalls but the Bassman gives you a full dose. In a sense it's like the elusive sound you might struggle in vain to pull out of a vintage-style Marshall circuit. When you're using heavy overdrive with a Les Paul, the way the bass holds together is phenomenal because it remains totally unflustered. The transient response is particularly fast and the wound strings on Strats have a really lively springiness. So although it's similar to the blackface amps in tone and clarity, the playing feel is closer to that of the earlier tweeds."*

KEY FEATURES

- **MODEL** 5F6-A Bassman
- **YEAR OF MANUFACTURE** 1959
- **POWER** 45W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AY7, 2x 12AX7, 2x 6L6, 1x GZ34
- **SPEAKER** 1x Celestion Gold 10 & 3x Celestion Vintage 10
- **KEY MODS** Speaker swap, 2 switchable 8-ohm dummy load resistors for 3x10" or 2x10" attenuated operation

Mojo workin' This Bassman has been re-housed in a Mojo reissue cabinet, which helped make it affordable

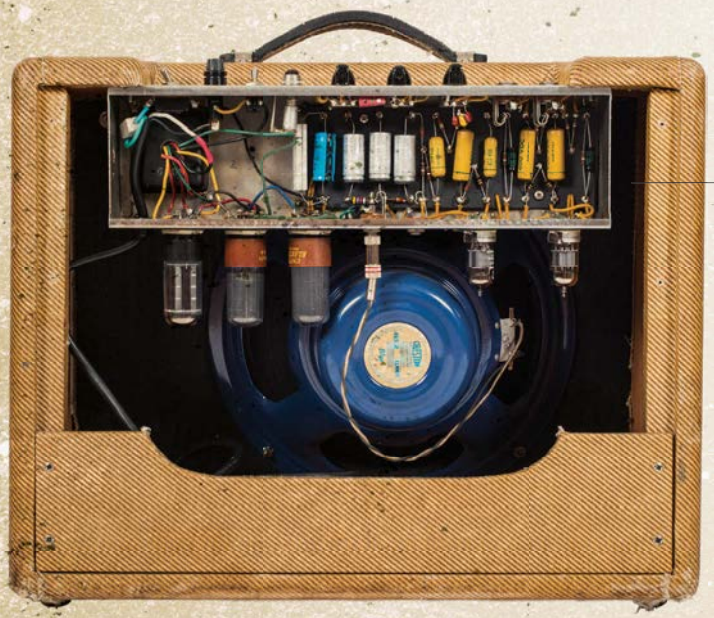
'Board games The Bassman's original components were initially transferred to a fibreglass board, but later a new circuit board was assembled using carbon composite resistors and orange drop capacitors

Tight fit The original Jensen speakers were once again swapped for Celestions. A Vintage 10 wouldn't fit on the top left, so a G10 Gold was used instead

Back in lacq For our Workshop feature on this amp, we lacquered and relic'd the tweed for a more vintage look

1959 5E3 Deluxe

Perfect nick **Unlike the other amps on test here, the tweed on our 5E3 is all-original and in very good condition for an amp that's approaching 60 years old**



Power ranger **While the cab is all-original, the output transformer has been swapped for an early 60s type seen on Fender's Princeton amps**

Biased opinion **The ground switch has been replaced with a bias tweak to subtly brighten and tighten the tone**

Check out 70s studio photos of artists such as Neil Young and The Eagles and you'll often see 5E3 Deluxes lurking in the background. Although big rigs were de rigeur for concerts, they were hard to record when there was a requirement to run them flat out for overdrive and high-gain amps, like high-end overdrive pedals, were still a thing of the future at that point.

Discerning players realised these medium-power tweed Deluxes produced the tones they needed at more acceptable volume levels. In other words they were a one-box solution for overdrive and sustain in a studio environment. Consequently some of the biggest-selling records of the era had 5E3 Deluxe tones all over, and yet you could still pick them up in pawn shops for peanuts.

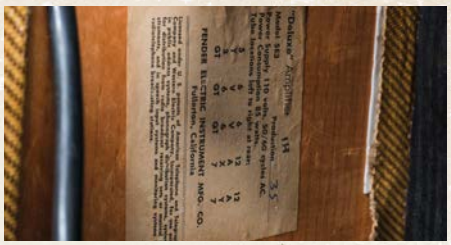
These days bands can rely on decent PA systems so amps such as the 5E3 Deluxe have become viable for gigging. Of all the classic tweeds, the 5E3 is the most copied and it's also a popular model for DIY builds. So what makes it so special?

The circuit is quite different from the Deluxe models that preceded it. Previously the signal passed straight from V1 to the phase inverter but Fender introduced a unity gain cathodyne inverter for the 5E3, utilising one half of a double triode. This freed up the other half for an extra gain stage after the tone control.

According to 5E3 expert, Rob Robinette, "The extra preamp gain stage makes up for some of the gain lost in the phase inverter but the unity gain cathodyne phase inverter simply cannot drive the power tubes as hard as a paraphase phase inverter". This means that most of the overdrive comes from the preamp stage rather than the power valves, which equates to a proto-high-gain rock and grunge tone.

This example, kindly lent to us by Simon Howells, is in fantastic shape and it still has its original tweed. The output transformer has been changed to an early 60s Princeton type and a Celestion Blue is preferred to the Jensen P12R. Having thoroughly tested the circuit, the factory fitted Astron signal capacitors were retained because none were leaky.

The power stage has new filter capacitors and the bypass and bias electrolytics were replaced. The circuit itself is totally stock and unmodified



although the ground switch has been repurposed to provide a bias tweak, which subtly brightens and tightens the tone.

CHRIS *"This has certainly got that splatty Neil Young characteristic to the overdrive that the others here don't have. This really came to life for me with a clean sound and an ES-330, because it produced a huge widescreen sparkle that I didn't expect. When you use it with a Tele bridge pickup and roll the guitar's volume off, the 5A3 cleans up without losing much volume, while this doesn't do that quite as well. Arguably the fun and excitement of the 5A3 corresponds with the frequency range where an electric guitar needs to sit in a mix, whereas this does extremes that you might not be able to use to full effect in a standard band mix. Can I just have both of them!?"*

ED *"The extra low end doesn't necessarily help with your tone here, and with certain settings it can bombard you bit. So although it has a lot of top end, the clarity can suffer as a result of the huge bass. The 5A3 does the harmonic bloom thing like none of the others and the two Deluxes are very different amplifiers. The 5A3 is all about sparkle and juicy midrange that gives notes a vocal quality but this is marginally bigger sounding."*

HUW *"The 5A3 sounded clear to me with a Telecaster and I could hear more of the wood and fingers. I'd describe it as more revealing. Although the 5E3 has more bass extension than the 5A3, I think the lows also have slightly better definition while the 5A3 sounds a little softer. The scale of difference is really telling – an early blackface and late silverface Deluxe Reverb is essentially the same amp, and yet even though there's just a few years between the 5A3 and the 5E3 circuits, they are entirely distinct. It suggests to me that both were works in progress and Leo felt he had things nailed by the start of the blackface era. After that it was just minor tweaks."*

KEY FEATURES

- **MODEL** 5E3 Deluxe
- **YEAR OF MANUFACTURE** 1959
- **POWER** 15W
- **VALVES** 1x 12AY7, 1x 12AX7, 2x 6V6, 1x 5Y3G
- **SPEAKER** Celestion Blue
- **KEY MODS** Speaker swap, 2-way bias switch in place of ground switch

General Observations

CHRIS *"People laugh when I say I don't always appreciate super-versatile gear because you get option paralysis. But just because an amp is simple, like every one of these tweeds, that doesn't mean it isn't versatile. You just have to figure out how to tap into that versatility rather than expect it at the touch of a button or flick of a switch.*

"It's important to stress we're not looking at vintage tweeds with misty eyed reverence and saying they got it right first time. They got it mostly right but we're now in a lovely position to take the best of the old stuff, upgrade or modify certain parts and make something vintage work even better in a modern context. If I was blindfolded and played recordings of all the amps we have tested, the two I'm confident I could pick out are the 5E3 with its exploding overdrive, and almost any sound from the Bassman. Those are the two utterly definitive tweed tones.

"Rock 'n' roll was an American art form and what we're dealing with here are functioning artefacts from a hugely significant cultural period. These things come from the source and modern clones can't compete with the thrill and excitement of that, no matter how good they might be."

ED *"People who are used to channel switching and the instantaneous tone changes of modern amps might find tweeds a bit limiting. The volume controls only increase volume up to a point and after that it's just more overdrive and compression. I used to keep all my guitar controls on 10 and use pedals to get different levels and overdrive tones, but since getting into tweed amps I've realised that you can get a huge canvas of tones all at similar volume levels. You simply have to use the controls on your guitar if you want to explore the full range of what these amps can do, but on top of that, you can use pedals, too. So the sonic horizons are actually expanded rather than limited. Pedals become like the icing on an already great cake rather than the cream filling that's needed to make it palatable. However, much depends on having really good pickups and controls that are properly wired. If you don't, tweed amps will let you know!"*

HUW *"I've noticed that when players get really into the tweed thing their interest in pedals begins to wane. Joe Bonamassa is a case in point. That's because in addition to the sonic variation pedals can provide, we also use them in a 'corrective' sort of way. For example a compressor may soften transient spikes to improve touch dynamics, an overdrive can increase sustain or a chorus pedal may provide harmonic sparkle and movement with an otherwise uninspiring amp. With each of the tweeds we have tested, and indeed any well-sorted tweed-style amp through a compatible speaker, all that is taken care of for you. Rather than being an essentially neutral sound generator, the amps themselves become integral to 'the sound' and pedals revert to being effects rather than problem solvers or a safety net.*

"Perhaps one potential drawback of vintage tweed amps, and vintage accurate repros, is that there is no onboard reverb. I also don't think small tweeds are the best match for fuzz, because when you add massive quantities of harmonic overtones to an already harmonically dense sound, it's harder to discern the texture and character of the fuzz circuit. I was lucky to acquire a few decent vintage guitars back when they were still affordable and more than one person has asked which I would grab first in the event of an earthquake or tsunami. The honest answer is that I would grab my 5A3 Deluxe first and then go back for the guitars. Being the current custodian of the guitars has been a privilege and pleasure, but owning such an early example of Leo Fender's work has made me feel more connected to history than any of them."

Which Do You Want?

CHRIS *"The Super is like the perfect storm and it would be the ideal gigging amp. The 5E3 and Bassman are iconic but in a sense those sounds 'belong' to other people already. Overall, however, I'd say my favourites are the 5A3 and the Super, because they're not archetypes and it seems there's more scope for self-expression with sounds you haven't heard a thousand times before. What am I going to do with a 5E3 or Bassman that someone hasn't already done better? My favourite combination of the day was Huw's Gibson ES-330 through the Super – it's like a bigger version of all the things I like about the 5A3 and the cleans are just so pretty."*

ED *"I'd also say that the Super and the 5A3 are the ones I enjoy the most when I've been playing guitar on my own. However in a band context the Bassman is a wonderful thing, with a really authoritative voice that can punch through a mix and in a sense we haven't heard it at its best in this shootout context. Bizarrely I also like playing the Bassman quietly with a Strat because it sounds like you're on a record. And then there's playing loud through the Super for its smooth overdrive, compression and chime... I lusted after a 5E3 for years but I think the 5A3 does everything the 5E3 and Vibrolux can do – only better. But really, we're discussing subtle shades of awesomeness here!"*

HUW *"The smooth transients, incredibly articulate and detailed midrange and low bass roll-off mean that everything I'd want from a studio guitar sound is inherent in the 5A3 and I can easily record it without having to resort to equalisation or compression. Unexpectedly the Super is the one that feels most like the 5A3 to play, with its compression and upper harmonic bloom. My favourite combinations have been both of those amps with a Telecaster and although the Super would be the more practical general-purpose amp, the 5A3 just shades it for sheer tone."*

Tweeds In The Wild

Fender tweed amps have been studio darlings for decades, but here **ED OLESZKO** explains how gigging with these classic combos is something worth exploring, even with modern volume constraints...

When playing with my wedding band, the first question other guitarists usually ask is related to my amps. And when I confirm that yes, that is indeed a couple of real 1950s Fender tweed amplifiers next to the wedding buffet, the reaction is usually a mix of shock and confusion!

Vintage valve amps have rather unfairly acquired a reputation for being problematic. Tales of fragile and valuable amps going up in flames don't exactly fill you with confidence pre-gig! However I have found vintage tweed Fenders to be the most reliable and toneful amplifiers I've ever used on stage.

1950s Fender amps were constructed so well in the first place, its no surprise that so many are still going strong 60 years later. With some careful preparation, they will keep rocking for many years to come. Vintage hand-wired amps are also easier for a tech to fix. Just try getting someone to fix your faulty four-channel multi-switching monster on the morning before a big gig!

I've come to think of tweed amps as musical instruments in their own right, rather than simply devices to make your guitar louder. Here are some of the tips and tricks I've picked up over the past few years of regular gigging with vintage Fenders...

Safety first

Before anything else, have your amp checked for electrical safety by a competent and qualified tech. Capacitors often need replacing and vintage tweed amps must be properly grounded. Many aren't. They can also contain dangerous asbestos on the rear panel. Exercise caution! Use the correct step-down transformer if your amps are still US 110-volt spec. Putting an RCD in-line can never be a bad idea either.

Build wise, the valve retainers and preamp shields provide valuable protection to fragile glass, but a good strong cover or flight case is a worthy investment. The old leather handles often need replacing, however, and going through the amp carefully tightening screws and bolts can minimise issues such as unwanted rattles at gig volume.

Valve swapping

There's hours of fun to be had experimenting with preamp valves. The inherent tonal

transparency of 50s Fender circuits allows you to hear the subtle differences between preamp valve types and even brands.

A 12AY7 in V1 provides huge dynamic headroom, and driven by an overdrive pedal it won't compress as much as some valves. On the other hand, a 12AX7 has lots more gain and compression and can push traditional tweed tone into Bluesbreaker territory, yet is still sweet and dynamic when your guitar's volume is rolled down. Something like a 5751 is a great middle-ground between the two, rich yet still clear and dynamic. Try the high and low inputs as they all have different tones, and a patch lead allows you to blend channels with fantastic results.

I find NOS power and rectifier valves sound less compressed, more harmonically complex and rich when compared with cheaper modern valves. They also last longer. Remember NOS valves were built to higher spec and tolerances because they needed to keep tanks rolling and planes flying!

Bring matched sets of backups to every gig. A nice foam padded camera case is the perfect protection – what may seem an annoying extra expenditure now, might one day save your gig!

However before you begin trawling the web late at night to fill your vintage amp with expensive and rare NOS glass, let me share a rather humbling recent experience. I spent a lot of time and cash searching for the 'vintage correct' NOS RCA 12AY7 for my 5E4-A Super, and had it sent all the way from the USA.

Upon installation, the tone was disappointingly bright and brittle compared with a modern (and easily replaceable) £12 EHX 12AY7, with its fatter midrange tone. So let your own ears guide you.

Vintage valve amps can sometimes crackle and pop, and DC leaking through a guitar cable can make the controls on your guitar noisy - especially at gig levels. One cure I've found is to use a passive splitting box containing an isolating transformer between the guitar and amp. It's simple and effective, with the added benefit that you can run two amps or even run into two inputs of the same amp simultaneously for bigger tones.

Stompboxes

Because tweeds are so dynamic, I generally set mine to the point of natural overdrive, generally all controls to eight, then get clean tones by rolling down my guitar's volume. However, this isn't always practical live.

One trick is to use a compressor with the output level lower than the bypass level; you can effectively 'clean up' your tone by activating the compressor while adding some subtle smoothing to help arpeggios sing.

Some of the higher-wattage tweed amps can have a very honest and revealing voice. It's great for slicing through a busy live band, but demands huge accuracy from every note. This is fine if you are blessed with the fingers of Eric, but rather unforgiving for the rest of us!

Luckily tweed amps simply devour overdrive pedals. I still remember the first time I hit the front end of an already overdriven vintage Fender tweed amp with a TS-9... a wonderfully rich tone, deep warm bass, smoky vocal midrange with a complex 3D high end blooming full of harmonics.... And that was just an open G chord! Wait till you hear an A!

Tweeds also take clean boosts really well. They help to fatten smaller tweeds and give a useful volume hike in bigger models. Fuzzes and modulations all work fantastically to widen an already expansive palette of tones. Some may find an overdriven tweed amp quite bright and unforgiving in isolation, however once played alongside a full band, that sheen of harmonics will cut and slice through a mix, and you will be thankful for the quick attack and tweedy compression your tone has gained. Best of all, the tone of vintage tweeds is not particularly ear fatiguing for you, other musicians or most importantly your audience.

"Since discovering vintage tweed amps my pedalboard has shrunk considerably"

Since discovering vintage tweed amps my pedalboard has shrunk considerably. Many of the effects I used were compensating for the deficiencies of my other amps, but the tweeds don't have those issues and my tone is simply better without pedals. This also saves weight and time when setting up and loading out.

All I really need to get through a set of tunes from the 60s to the modern era is an overdrive pedal and a tuner. The natural resonance in the lightweight pine cabs make any reverb or delay pedals a luxury effect rather than a necessity for your core tone.

Speakers

The stock 50s Jensen P10r or P12rs sound wonderfully sweet at lower levels, sprinkling a lovely airiness and harmonic sheen over clean tones. However when played loud and pushed into overdrive, they can get somewhat gritty, ragged and mushy – leading to your tone getting rather lost in a band mix. Also, I've found the original 50s Jensens are not very rugged, and after a few months of hard gigging they often need to be re-coned.

However, changing speakers can be one of the most cost-effective and sonically rewarding upgrades you can make to a tweed amp. A Celestion G12 Alnico Blue is a perfect match for the lower wattage tweed Fenders such my '57 5F11 Vibrolux. Despite its 15-watt rating, the 100dB Blue is very efficient and loud, simultaneously emphasising chime while smoothing out any rough gritty edges. They also sound better and better the more gigs you play though them!

In a 5F6-A Bassman, ceramic Celestion G10 Vintage speakers sound really punchy and solid, however due to position of the transformer, they will fit in only three of the four speaker positions! Luckily instead of having to rely on keeping one of the stock Jensen's with their smaller alnico magnet (and cone-blowing propensity), a Celestion Alnico Gold G10 will fit into the 'problem' position' to deliver some of the Jensen's airiness along with a hint of British chime.

Attenuators

The single most useful tool I've ever come across, with regards to gigging, has been the development of all-in-one-box attenuators/power amps such as the Bad Cat Unleash and Freyette Power Station. Their ability to uncouple the fundamental relationship between gain and volume has completely revolutionised my stage setup. As long as your speakers or extension cab can handle it, you can gig with any amp at any volume and get the exact tone and response you want.

When gigging in smaller rooms even my smaller Tweed amps can sometimes be too loud. In these situations it's great to run an attenuator. However the far more difficult and common problem I've had is hearing my amp at larger gigs. While mic'ing up the amp often means the audience hears you perfectly, monitoring is a luxury that most wedding gigs don't afford, and therefore you can get somewhat lost in a busy on stage mix.

Devices such as the Power Station effectively solve all these problems. The fact that you can also add post-amp effects in an effects loop is icing on an already magnificent cake. These are the proverbial Swiss Army Knives and every gigging guitarist should consider buying one as they will serve as a backup should you amp ever fail in addition to attenuating your amp. Having owned and gigged both, the Bad Cat wins for compact size and low weight, but the valve-powered Freyette's tone is a touch more transparent. Both are excellent bits of kit that I can recommend.

Verdict

Having owned various shades of Marshall, Fender and Orange amps I can tell you tweeds also have one great advantage for sufferers of GAS (Gear Acquisition Syndrome) – to the uninitiated they all look the same! That means that once you have two or more, your significant other will begin to lose count and you can sneak more past them! Finally of course, there's the real reason tweed amps are the best – they all go to 12!

Pedal Pushing

While hugely dynamic and versatile in their own right, the tone and tactile response of vintage tweed Fender amps make them excellent pedal platforms. Here are 12 tweed-friendly stompboxes to try...

Story **Ed Oleszko**

J Rockett Archer

The mythical Klon Centaur is a magnificent match to the warm, mid-rich tone of a tweed amp. A brilliant sounding boost and mild overdrive in its own right, the Klon's buffer maintains clarity and treble while you roll back your guitar's volume control – perfect for tweed amps. Unfortunately, the real things go for scary money these days, but J Rockett's Archer is a Klone par excellence.

Origin Effects Cali76-TX

A useful trick to obtain lush, easy playing clean tones from a from a vintage tweed is to get the amp overdriving, then use a compressor set below unity gain to reduce the signal reaching the amp. This not only cleans up beautifully but also allows you accurate control over the subtle dynamics. Using high-quality pedal such as the Cali76-TX also gives the retro vibe of running through a 60s recording console.

Germanium Fuzz Face

The magnificence of the germanium Fuzz Face circuit is that it cleans up beautifully to a sparkling clean tone as you roll back your guitar's volume, which is also one of the most revered qualities of a good vintage tweed amp. The pairing of a germanium fuzz into a wound-up tweed complement each other perfectly leading to a huge retro fuzz sound, squishy tactile playing response and hours of fun!

Ibanez Tube Screamer

Despite its oft-cited flaws of rolling off low end, pushing midrange and compressing your tone, it's these exact attributes that make the humble Tube Screamer the best pedal around for a vintage tweed. Engage a TS and the sometimes flabby low end is perfectly tightened up for taught riffing, while the Tube Screamer's bold midrange frequency boost adds gain and compression to the tweed's already strong mids.

MXR M300 Reverb

The use of lightweight pine in vintage Fender cabinets adds a natural 3D quality that can make reverb or slapback redundant. However modern reverb pedals go far beyond simple spring emulations into more esoteric and atmospheric sounds that a shoegazer will adore. This MXR is a compact, true bypass, hugely flexible unit packed with great sounds that gel really well with a vintage tweed.

MXR Phase 90

Phasers and other modulation pedals can sound fantastically rich, three dimensional and warm through a tweed. The natural compression of the circuit smooths out any rough edges and heightens even the most extreme phaser 'ray-gun' sweeps or robotic flanger jet noises, enhancing the effect musically as part of the amp's core tone. Be wary of damaging old Jensen speakers if you still have them, though...

Pro Co RAT

An old RAT with the LM308 chip into an overdriven tweed produces the kind of tones you'd associate with 80s rock rather than Americana. With the pedal's gain set high the RAT produces a fierce drive verging on fuzz that gels with the amp's tone instead of overwhelming it as some distortion pedals can. Try one with the neck pickup of a Les Paul with the tone rolled back and it's pure GN'R.

Xotic EP Boost

A vintage Maestro EP3 Echoplex gives you incomparably warm musical tape echo (and lots of maintenance hassle) but lots of the magic fairy dust in that old box is in the preamp circuit – adding a sweet top end sparkle and lift in presence while subtly shifting the midrange emphasis. Many companies now offer a great take on the EP preamp in in pedal format, notably Xotic and Dunlop.

Paul Cochrane Timmy

The Timmy is a superb pedal to use with a vintage tweed amp. Tonally warmer and more neutral than even the best vintage Tube Screamer, clever tweaking of the Timmy's expanded two-band EQ also reduces that notorious midrange honk and pushes the tweed into a smooth, crisp, articulate overdrive that edges into 'blackface' Fender territory as opposed to the tweed's traditional midrange bark.

Ibanez/Maxon AD9 Delay

Analog delay pedals sit really nicely with a tweed amp. They're useful to widen your sound in a one-guitar band, add 50s slapback or even longer epic delays. Other than an overdrive, it's arguably the only other pedal you'd use throughout a whole set when gigging a tweed. The Boss DM-3 has lots of fans for good reason but vintage Maxon/Ibanez AD9s have a more musical decay and aren't quite as dark.

Way Huge Overrated Special

This was designed by Jeorge Tripps for Joe Bonamassa, to push his already cooking vintage tweeds into further saturation, sustain and drive. Despite being in a similar gain ballpark, it's less mid-focused and compressed than a Tube Screamer, and has a neutral, balanced tonality into a clean amp. The 500Hz control is perfect to thicken up a single coil or push a PAF with a thick, authoritative tone.

Lehle 1at3

An A/B/Y pedal is a useful addition to a four-input tweed amp. Turning the volume up above halfway simply adds gain rather than more volume. This can be used to your advantage with an A/B pedal allowing you to switch channels between an overdriven sound and something cleaner whilst maintaining a consistent volume level. Products from Lehle and Radial come highly recommended.

www.eastmanguitars.com

California Love

The amp circuits of the 1950s continue to inspire modern amp-makers to scale spectacular heights. Here's a selection of new amps with vintage tweed tone in their DNA...

CLARK BEAUFORT

- **PRICE** $1,915
- **CONTACT** www.clarkamplification.com

One of the boutique amp world's most highly-rated 5E3 clones comes with our favoured Celestion Blue as standard

CARR SKYLARK

- **PRICE** £2,399
- **CONTACT** www.carramps.com

This take on a Fender Harvard with onboard spring reverb and attenuation might be our favourite Steve Carr design

VICTORIA SILVER SONIC

- **PRICE** c$3,395
- **CONTACT** www.vintageguitar.com

The Silver Sonic runs a pair of 6V6 valves in a lower wattage 5F6-A Bassman circuit and comes with reverb and tremolo

GARTONE BLUESMAN AMP 18W

- **PRICE** £1,750 (with Celestion Blue)
- **CONTACT** www.gartoneamps.co.uk

Another expert 5E3 replica worthy of your consideration, Martin Garton also makes 35-, 45- and 80-watt tweeds

SWART ATOMIC SPACE TONE

- **PRICE** £2,099
- **CONTACT** www.swartamps.com

Inspired by a Gibson Scout, the AST packs tweedy crunch, spellbinding cleans, 'verb and tremolo into a lightweight box

RIFT AMPS TWEED 15TV

- **PRICE** £1,099
- **CONTACT** www.riftamps.com

This 5A3 'TV Front' Deluxe clone proves there's plenty of life in late 40s circuits. The ultimate Telecaster amp?

LAZY J 20

- **PRICE** From £1,699 (+VAT)
- **CONTACT** www.lazyjprojects.com

Jesse Hoff's 5E3-inspired tone machine is still as in-demand as ever and can be ordered with reverb and tremolo

TWO-ROCK BURNSIDE

- **PRICE** £2,199
- **CONTACT** www.two-rock.com

Look out for a review of Two-Rock's new take on a wide-panel tweed circuit in the July issue of *G&B*

FENDER THE EDGE DELUXE

- **PRICE** £2,009
- **CONTACT** www.fender.com

Fender's own tweaked-up take on the 5E3 Deluxe that the U2 guitarist has used to get his dirty kicks since *Vertigo*

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CHUCK BERRY

18.10.26 – 18.3.17

When Chuck Berry passed away in March, we lost perhaps the most influential figure in the history of the electric guitar. The man himself tells **ELLIOT STEPHEN COHEN** the story of his remarkable life, while luminaries from The Beach Boys, Animals and Kinks discuss Chuck's impact on their music...

Chuck Berry's death on 18 March 2017 at the age of 90 marked the end of one of the last few remaining links to America's golden age of rock 'n' roll. Of that remarkable generation of trailblazers and giants, only Fats Domino, Little Richard and Jerry Lee Lewis remain. Since Berry's death, countless condolences have appeared in the media, from musicians he influenced heavily, such as Keith Richards, Mick Jagger and Paul McCartney, to former presidents. Perhaps John Lennon, certainly a devotee, put it most succinctly back in 1972 when he told an American television audience, "If you had to give rock 'n' roll another name, you might call it Chuck Berry."

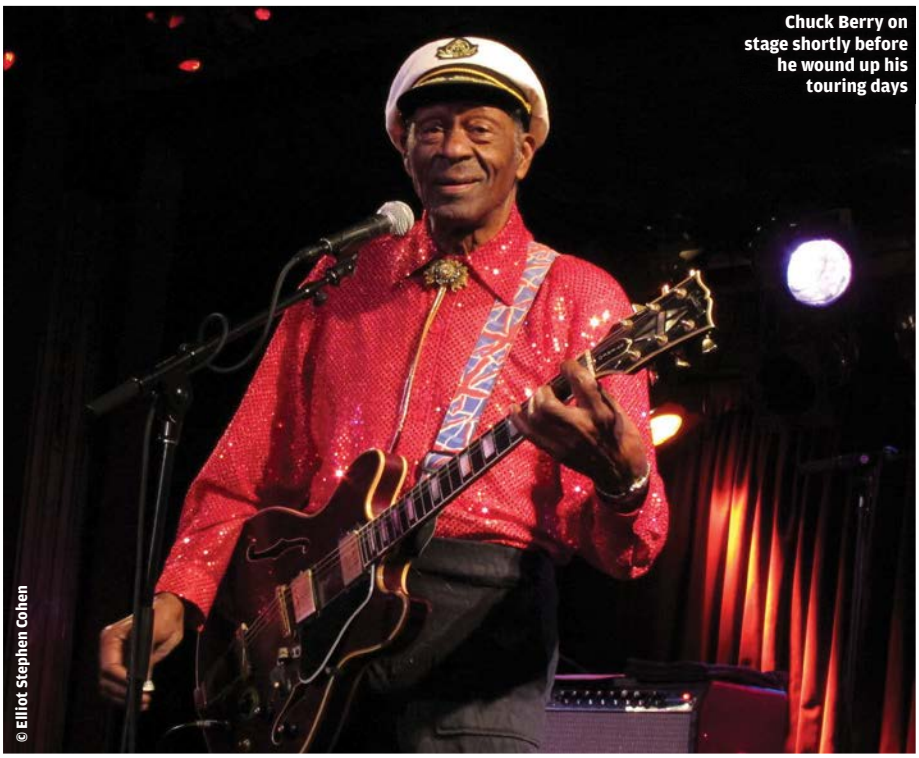
For the past few decades, Berry's recording career had been put on hold and Chuck seemed content with appearances mostly at the Blueberry Hill music club and restaurant in his hometown of St Louis, Missouri. However, two years ago, age finally caught up with the then 89-year-old guitarist, and he decided that it was time to finally finish work on what would become his final studio album, *Chuck*, set for release on 16 June. The advance single, *Big Boys*, is currently available to stream or download, and it contains all the hallmarks of classic Berry – a driving beat, a cool story and, of course, plenty of hot guitar licks...

You Never Can Tell

While Chuck was often saddled with a reputation for being arrogant to the point of almost being abusive (Keith Richards famously received a black eye after foolishly touching one of Berry's prized guitars) he could not have been more congenial when this writer met him backstage at a gig some years ago – posing for photos and signing autographs with good humour and grace, he even adorned his signature with some meticulously drawn smiley faces!

During our earlier interview, Chuck answered questions with class and dignity – even the tough ones. The conversation began with him remembering the legendary stage shows that he was part of in the 1950s...

"Oh man, we had nine different tours going, and the biggest one lasted 92 days straight, with two days off," Chuck recalled of the relentless schedule. "The major package tour was called The Biggest Show of Stars. It was a little bit before your time, baby! I can remember it so easily because it's so >



Chuck Berry on stage shortly before he wound up his touring days

DAVE DAVIES

As one of the progenitors of heavy rock guitar, ex-Kinks guitarist Dave Davies set the template with powerchord riffing on *You Really Got Me* and *All Day And All Of The Night*. His new album, *Open Road*, recorded with his son Russ, explores various musical palettes and influences...

Q What was your first exposure to Chuck?
"When I was around 11, I had an American friend whose parents sent him a 45 of *Sweet Little Sixteen*. I was really mesmerised by that record. Some years later, [brother] Ray and I went to see a film called *Jazz On A Summer's Day* [a documentary on the 1958 Newport Jazz Festival], and Chuck's part in it was just amazing. I think that really got us interested in music, and set us on a path for rock 'n' roll."

Q The Kinks had many Chuck Berry songs in their early repertoire.
"Yes, on our first album we did *Too Much Monkey Business* and I sang *Beautiful Delilah*. Our early concerts were scattered with other songs of his, like *Little Queenie*."

Q Did you ever get to meet Chuck?
"I met him briefly at an airport in the 80s. I only got to talk to him for about 20 minutes. He was a bit grumpy, but I was just so pleased to see him that I didn't care [laughs] because I'd been so in awe of him, since seeing the clip of him in the jazz film."

Q Did he know who you were?
"Yeah, but it was a bit like he didn't really want to talk, but it was sweet that I actually met him."

Q What would be your top two or three Berry records?
"I mean, *Memphis* [*Tennessee*] has got to be up there, 'cos it was such an unusual piece of work. *Nadine* was such a cool track. I mean, they're all good. I can't think of one that I didn't like."

Q What do you see as Chuck Berry's greatest talent?
"He really had the whole set. He was a great poet, way before Dylan. His lyrics were incredible, very colourful. His sense of humour was really cool, but it was in line with the music. He wasn't a comedian, but he was funny. He looked cool. His clothes were cool. He played fabulous guitar. His tone was great. His whole guitar style was very unusual for the time, the way he'd bend those clusters, something I still use a lot on stage. He could dance, and he always looked so confident. I think that's really what got me."

Q Would there have been a Kinks without Chuck?
"Umm... that's a tough one because we've had so many influences. Of course, he inspired The Kinks, but without his influence we would have just been a different band."

prominent in my memory. We would have LaVern Baker, The Coasters, The Platters, Fats Domino. I even worked with Tony Bennett, but people like him, who weren't rock 'n' roll, weren't on the regular tours. On little stops we did, like the Newport Jazz Festival in 1958, I worked with people like Ray Charles and Gerry Mulligan, but getting back to the regular touring acts, we had Bobby Darin, The Big Bopper, Eddie Cochran, and what's that guy with the funny name that became a big country star?"

Your correspondent offers up the name of country legend Conway Twitty as the potential owner of that 'funny name'...

"There you go. You know 'em all! We also had Jerry Lee Lewis and the guy from Lubbock, Texas," he recalled, referring of course, to Buddy Holly. "We had dinner at his home in Lubbock when our tour passed through there, two years before the incident [Holly's fatal 1959 plane crash]. He had a drummer [Jerry Allison] who you didn't hear too much about because he wasn't the leader, but he was just as beautiful as Buddy. I remember him mainly for saying [adopts Texan accent] 'Balooka, Texas', which he was always talking about."

Rock And Roll Music

During those days one could see 25 major recording acts on one show for between three and four dollars, but you didn't see them for long. "Each person's set would last around eight minutes," Chuck explained. "Everyone played their own hits, and they really were hits then. Every one was at least in the Top 40, and you would do your three or four hits and boom, you were off. That's what made the shows so hot. They were like listening to the radio and watching TV at the same time."

Despite winning over audiences with his music, Berry and other African-American performers were subjected to the climate of racism that still existed many Southern states. Audiences were divided by race, with white fans on one side of the theatre and black fans on the other, sometimes with rope partitions in the centre of the auditorium. As incredible as it seems now seems, there were even laws prohibiting interracial acts performing on the same stage. But checking into hotels while touring was just as restrictive....

"We didn't stay in segregated hotels, but rather in the black boarding houses that were in every city where we stopped," Berry explained. "Somehow or other, somebody would get in touch with one of them. So, it would be like going to a different country club in every town. Many of the major towns also had their big black hotels like this one in Norfolk, Virginia, that was owned by a doctor. We always used to stay there."

Promised Land

Over the years, many critics have written that if he had been white, Chuck Berry and

not Elvis Presley would now be considered to be 'The King Of Rock 'N' Roll'. Did Chuck agree with that assessment?

"We'd have to ask the masses," he countered. "Because they're the only ones who could have dubbed either of us with that title. Like for instance, I've always told [Little] Richard, 'Man, will you stop going around telling people you're 'The King.' They already know that!' Also, Jerry Lee Lewis does the same thing. There are so many 'Kings' running around, and what does it really mean anyway? Is it a way for someone to take back some of the thrills they may have given to an audience over the years?"

But given the huge racial tensions in American society that were so close to boiling over in that fractured period, did he feel that his race worked against him in those early days?

"Well, acceptance could have been easier to find in prejudiced places that catered predominantly to white people, so what can I say?" he admitted. "There was a lot more ironing to do on being black than being white, but by the same token it was easier in some respects. Like for instance when they would play an all-black dance, the white acts wouldn't go over too good. A lot of people there would figure, 'Well, this guy's white. He's got it made.' The ignorant types at the dances would think that way. I have always hated racial bias because I grew up in that atmosphere. I have no preference for one person over another because one is black and one is white."

"I play for the masses who, let's face it, are predominantly white. So I can work 10 times as many places playing popular music as I can playing soul music and, if popular music is white, then Lord help us, I'll go in that direction. I don't plot a show. I let the audience request what they want, and I play it. 90 per cent of my shows are usually requests."

You Can't Catch Me

Chuck's live performances are the thing of rock 'n' roll legend, and so it would have been churlish to waste the opportunity to ask the man himself about the origin of his most famous stage move, the duck walk... >

AL JARDINE

Founding Beach Boy Alan Jardine has provided the pop icons with rhythm guitar and both background and lead vocals for more than 50 years. He is presently touring with band leader Brian Wilson on a *Pet Sounds* 50th Anniversary tour that comes to the UK in July

Q How influential do you think Berry was on Brian Wilson in the early days?
"Well, he was one of the major ones, of course, because Carl [Wilson] was the Beach Boys lead guitar player. He and Brian lived in the same house before the group became famous and worked out a lot of band arrangements together."

Q Of course Berry sued Brian for using the melody of *Sweet Little Sixteen* for *Surfin' USA* and got full writer's credits, even though it was all Brian's lyrics...
"Brian may not have realized it when he wrote the song because, when you emulate stuff, sometimes you forget where the idea came from. Then it's too late to change it."

Q Chuck must have also influenced your guitar style...
"Definitely. When I'm onstage, I love playing the riff to *Maybellene*. The riffs he invented are timeless. We use one in the opening of *Fun, Fun, Fun*, which originally was Carl's template. I would describe Chuck's style as more of a rhythm guitar style, although of course he did play lead."

Q As the folkie of The Beach Boys, do you recognize elements of folk music in some of his songs?
"*Johnny B Goode* was kind of like a folk song in that it was about a little guy growing up in the South and listening to the train go by, 'chug, chug, chug...' that driving beat. Chuck had the literary talent to put those ideas to a beat, and make a story out it.A lot of Chuck's musical ideas came from Johnnie Johnson who played some amazing piano on his records. I'm sure Chuck learned that left-handed piano rhythm pattern from him and interpreted it to the guitar."

Q How would you describe the similarities between Chuck and Keith Richards, as a songwriter?
"Well, Keith is a lot like Chuck in the way he'll find a guitar line that invents an entire song, like he did with *Satisfaction*. That became a hallmark of the way The Stones write their songs."

Q How would you sum up what Chuck Berry was all about?
"He was just a natural. He was the inventor of a guitar sound that was the blueprint for a lot of us who came after him. Plus, he was a really hard-working guy. He wanted success so badly and had the passion to express our values through his music, in a way that had never been done before."

Dave Davies & Al Jardine images © Elliot Stephen Cohen

HILTON VALENTINE

Anyone who's ever heard the opening arpeggios in The Animals' 1964 classic, *House Of The Rising Sun*, knows the work of Hilton Valentine. The acclaimed *Skiffledog On Coburg St* is his most recent album

Q What were the very first Chuck Berry records you heard on the radio?
"I would think the first was probably *Roll Over Beethoven*, then later *School Days, Sweet Little Sixteen* and *Johnny B Goode*. There was a station called Radio Luxembourg that played a lot of rock 'n' roll, because the BBC was still very starchy at the time."

Q Did Berry's lyrics about things such as Cadillacs, Thunderbirds and hamburgers paint a picture of what America was like?
"Yes, certainly his lyrics opened up our minds and gave us a vision of what America was all about. It really intrigued us, and later as musicians we couldn't wait to get there."

Q What was touring with Chuck in Britain like? Did The Animals back him up?
"That was Kingsize Taylor and The Dominoes. There were around seven acts on those shows, and everyone would do between 10 and 20 minutes. We all travelled in a coach, a 'trip bus'. The tour lasted two weeks, and we got to know Chuck quite well. I've heard stories about how nasty he could be, but he was always great with us. Maybe because we were more 'bluesy' than a lot of other British bands like Herman's Hermits or Freddie and The Dreamers."

Q Was that the only time The Animals toured with Chuck?
"Oh no. When we first came to play in America at the Paramount Theatre in New York, Chuck was also on the shows. Because we had a big hit at the time with *House Of The Rising Sun*, they had us topping the bill. That really made me feel awkward because Chuck was one of my great heroes."

Q What do you see as the most important part of Berry's legacy?
"To me, Chuck was one of the greatest pioneering artists in rock 'n' roll. His guitar technique had such a major influence on so many of the British guitar greats. As a composer, he was like a modern-day poet, writing about relatable topics that we, as teenagers in the 50s, ate up like a sponge."

JOE BROWN

The term 'national treasure' is usually an overworked cliché. However, it certainly applies to Joe Brown MBE who has been entertaining audiences for over seven decades with his songs, sterling musicianship and quirky sense of humour

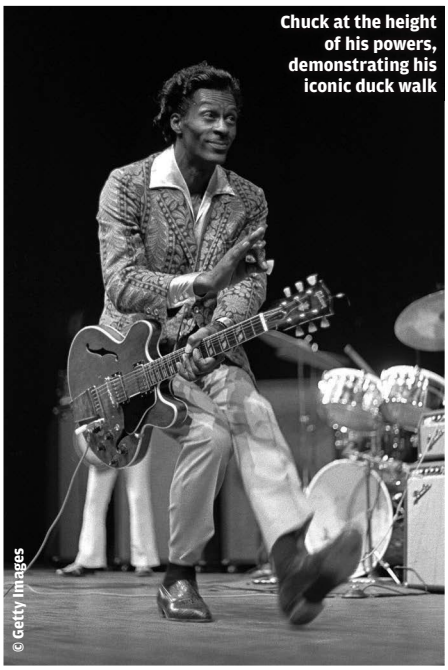
Q From starting out playing skiffle in the 50s, what made you switch over to playing Chuck Berry's music?
"A friend of mine, who played washboard in our group, brought me over to his house to hear these American rock 'n' roll records. That was it for me, and of course being a guitar player, Chuck Berry was my absolute hero. The first time I heard him, it hit me so hard."

Q What did you find particularly unique about his guitar style?
"Well, he didn't play a wide range of guitar. I mean, he played the same licks on everything he did. He wasn't Wes Montgomery or Django Reinhardt, but no one over here ever heard anyone play guitar like that. If you could just get them two fingers running around the top end, with the Chuck Berry beat, that was all you needed to play like him. Great riffs he had going on there. He was just a 100 per cent rock 'n' roll guitar player."

Q Did you ever meet him?
"I never met Chuck, but in the early 70s I was on a bill with him, Bill Haley, Jerry Lee Lewis and Little Richard at Wembley Stadium. It seemed like all of England was there. The show was just amazing and, of course, Chuck was great."

Q Did you and George Harrison talk a lot about him?
"George and I were great friends, and whenever we'd be talking about music, Chuck's name would come up all the time. We used to sit around and play all his old records. If you listen closely to the way George played guitar, you can hear a lot of Chuck's licks going on there."

Q What do you see as Chuck Berry's main legacy?
"I know a lot of people rave about his songs. I love the songs. His lyrics were fantastic, but to me, as musician, it was his guitar playing. Everybody in bands knows Chuck Berry. To all of us, he was *the* guitar player. There was nobody like him. I mean, who played the guitar like Chuck Berry?"



Chuck at the height of his powers, demonstrating his iconic duck walk

"Well, when I was about five years old, I used to scoot under the table and it used to be quite a sight to see," he chuckled. "So, whenever company came over, they would say to me, 'Kid, do your thing,' and I would do my little performance. Then one day, when I was doing a show at The Brooklyn Paramount Theatre, I did it spontaneously during an instrumental break, and it got such a big ovation that I decided to keep it in the act. I've learned a lot of short cuts along the way [laughs]."

Such is the impact of Chuck's music, there have been countless covers of his songs over the years, but they were all equal in his eyes.

"I just want to get you to understand that I don't look at copies in that respect," he affirmed. "Any copy, whether it's by an up-and-coming new artist, or an established one, would be equal in the acknowledgement and respect that I have for their interpretation of my music."

While Chuck's career had its share of deeply regrettable moments on and off the stage, he never fell into the trap of substance abuse that snared so many of his contemporaries, and the musicians who followed him, and it's something that Chuck clearly felt very strongly about.

"I've always been careful about staying away from pot and [stuff] like that," Berry insisted. "I've never liked liquor, but I knew all about drugs before I ever got curious to try them. Drugs are used to liberate minds, and the last part of me that I would want to liberate would be my mind, because that's where all of my inspiration comes from."

As we wound up our conversation, we couldn't help but wonder if, despite being able to reflect on a legendary and massively influential career, Chuck felt that he had received the acclaim and fame that he rightfully deserved?

"Well first off," he responded, "I've deserved only what came to me, I'd presume, because nobody gives anything away to anybody, but perhaps what I got wasn't what I deserved, but what was due."

STEVE HACKETT

Steve Hackett is one of Britain's most innovative guitarists. A founding member of Genesis, he is currently touring a show called Genesis Revisited, a combination of songs from his 1971 to 1977 tenure with the band, as well as numbers from his new solo album, *Night Siren*

Q Was your first exposure to Berry's music through the likes of The Beatles, The Rolling Stones, Kinks and Yardbirds?
"Yes. Chuck wrote the book of what The Beatles and those other bands were about to follow. Then of course after that, British radio started playing Chuck's own records. I think, *Nadine* was the first one I heard, then *Run, Run, Rudolph* and a whole bunch of things. Chuck started doing well on the British charts, mainly due to The Stones and The Beatles, and his lyrics really personified Americana to a lot of British musicians."

Q Did you ever cover any of Chuck's music over the years?
"Funnily enough, I have encored with *Chuck's Boogie* souped up and faster, blisteringly fast, although it's really quite simple because you're working with triplets and open strings. It's still a great groove, isn't it?"

Q What would top your list of favourite Chuck Berry recordings, either by him or cover versions?
"My top cover versions would include *Come On* by The Stones, *Rock And Roll Music* by The Beatles, Electric Light Orchestra's version of *Roll Over Beethoven* and I think in particular Keith Richards' solo on the Stones' *Route 66* is a killer. For Chuck's original versions, I'd go with *No Particular Place To Go*, *Nadine* and *Bye, Bye, Johnny* – which also has one my favourite guitar solos of his. Chuck was the first rock 'n' roll guitar hero. Without him, there would have been no Beatles and no Rolling Stones."

MICK BOX

Mick is the only surviving member of Uriah Heep's original 1969 line-up. He's currently part of a touring ensemble, Rock Meets Classic, along with fellow Heep man Bernie Shaw, Magnum's Bob Catley and Tony Clarkson, singer Rick Springfield, Toto's Steve Lukather and ex-Eagle, Don Felder

Q What first attracted you to Chuck Berry's music?

"He was the first guitarist I'd heard that actually bent chords. It was those three-note bends together that really excited me. A lot of his soloing was based around chords. So, if you were not too advanced on guitar, you could pick it up quite easily. With my first band I used to play *Sweet Little Sixteen*, *Memphis*, *Johnny B Goode*... all good fun. Once we started with those rhythms, people really got into it. Everyone would get up and dance and start enjoying themselves."

Q Did the lyrics also connect with you?

"Oh, definitely. He was really a poet. His lyrics were just amazing. Those images really triggered my imagination, totally. You just wanted to break out and discover what the whole American thing was all about. Except for Ray Davies of The Kinks who wrote songs about England, a lot British artists were inspired by Chuck to write songs about America."

Q And he was such an influence on British bands at that point...

"For sure. I mean, The Rolling Stones were the guys who introduced us to people like Chuck, weren't they? They were really wearing their heart on their sleeves, telling everyone their influences. That kind of opened up our floodgates. He had such a huge impact on all of us. I'm talking of course about his early songs, not the *My Ding-A-Ling* period. [laughs] It may have been very successful for him, but I wouldn't put it on the top of my list of his best songs."

Q You also kept Berry's songs in your shows, even after Heep gained fame as a heavy rock influenced band...

"Yes. If you listen to *Uriah Heep Live*, we do a rock 'n' roll medley that was born out of the days when we used to do all of the Chuck Berry stuff, and the people absolutely loved it."

Q What do you think is the most important aspect of Chuck's legacy?

"He was a master showman, with the duck walk and all the things that he did with the guitar. He had that very loose style in his playing, the way he could do those spreads. If you look at some of the old footage of him performing, you go, 'God almighty. Look at those hands'. They were bigger than my leg, mate!"

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THE Guitar & Bass INTERVIEW

"When I'm playing I try to imagine I'm singing it. To feel like I'm communicating something through the melody"

With the help of his iconic Fiesta Red Strat, Hank Marvin changed the face of British guitar music forever in The Shadows. Now, nearly 60 years on, the godfather of instrumental electric guitar has returned with a brand new album and a red Strat still in his hands...

Story **Paul Balmer** Photography **Jake Rotham**

Without A Word **saw Hank head back into the studio for the first time since 2014**

Hank Marvin is a guitarist who needs little introduction; in 1960 he defined the role of 'lead guitarist' and led The Shadows – the most popular British instrumental group of all time, to 69 chart successes. With his Fiesta red Strat he became the first British 'guitar hero', inspiring all that followed. With nothing to declare but his continuing love of making music, Hank recently re-entered the studio with his son Ben to make *Without A Word* – an album that includes many references to his 50s and 60s roots. He spoke to us from his home in Perth, Australia.

"I came up with the title," Hank explains of *Without A Word*'s on the nose name. "For me it sums up the concept that something is being said without words, which is how it is with instrumentals – it was a simple as that really!"

The album features a take on Lennon and McCartney's *Michelle*, which showcases Hanks signature eloquent phrasing. "I've always loved the tune, the 'major to minor' stuff," he notes. "It has a real French feel to it I wanted to listen again to the Beatles version, and just listen to how Paul sang it, and I just changed the phrasing a little bit here and there to make it a little less 'square', because 'without a word' I've not got a lyric to convey and I just felt a couple of little phrasing shifts seemed to work well for the guitar version. When we get to the famous guitar motif, which again I've always loved and in fact I think it was George Martin's input? It's very straight, and worked beautifully on the original, but I felt again for the guitar I wanted to change it a little bit and make it just a little bit syncopated. I used my Gypsy jazz guitar on this in fact.

"When I'm playing a tune, I like to try to imagine I'm singing it and use phrasing that works for me. To feel I'm communicating something through the melody against playing it straight, or changing it so much that you lose some charm of the original. It's a thin line between this and what can happen with jazz artists sometimes. I love improvised work, but when I play a great tune I always like to establish it first. If someone's written a great tune it's good to show you appreciate and respect the value of that tune."

> "I love to hear improvised work but if someone's written a great tune it's good to show that you respect it"

Foot loose

Hank is legendary for his expressive phrasing, but rather than use his Strat's controls to accentuate volume swells, he prefers to use a pedal to give that vocal quality to his lines.

"I've tried several pedals over the years," Hank confirms. "My first was a DeArmond tone and volume pedal – straight up and down was the volume, side to side the tone. Swing to the left and you've taken all the top off, to the right and take all the bass end off, and by doing a circular motion with the foot, coming from a bit more bass heavy, top light, not anywhere close to a wah-wah, but just starting with the tone you're finishing on, gives you a sort of 'mwah, mwah', quite a nice effect. But sadly it was a problem pedal, not the most robust, the mechanism would often fail, and secondly it chopped off a huge amount of volume from the amp.

"Later on I tried a powered Morley pedal. Then on tour I used Boss pedals, which were excellent. On this album I used a Morley pedal, I've got a couple of them. Some people like Jeff Beck have got a wonderful ability to use their little finger on the volume control, I find that difficult to do, because I hold the whammy bar in my hand, which Jeff doesn't, he uses his fingers on the strings >

After decades with the Strat, Hank is very particular about what he likes – including Sperzel tuners, nylon nuts and Easy-Mute vibrato arms

and then he uses the whammy bar almost as an afterthought – I find I can't do everything at once, moving the bar and trying to do the volume control with my little finger, it's a mess. I leave that to an expert like Jeff and I'll use the volume pedal!"

Quiet guitar hero

Hank's impact on the electric guitar is hard to understate, but the man himself certainly has a good go at downplaying his legacy...

"I'm very happy that I played a relatively modest part in furthering people's interest in music and in the guitar in particular," he shrugs. "Out of that early period there have come so many great players, and we all knew and listened to each other. We heard music, we were moved by and wanted to emulate it, but some of us had enough ability to develop our own style. The great players – Jeff Beck, Mark Knopfler, Brian May, Pete Townshend – they are all so different in their approach, you hear a few bars and know who it is, and I feel that's important. I feel happy that through the sound we created and the success we had, it motivated people to pick up the guitar."

Learning guitar in the 1950s was a very different prospect to how it is these days, and in some ways Hank found that a blessing...

"Because we had no knowledge of what was to come, our expectations were quite low really," he admits. "When I got my first guitar, I knew a little bit, I used to play banjo, in a couple of jazz bands. My skiffle group used to borrow a guitar and I learned all the three-chord tricks and a few minor chords, all very basic stuff but it worked for what we were doing. Then I think I'd heard Bert Weedon playing *Little Red Monkey* and I thought, 'Hey, he's playing the tune!' Then I started to listen to the radio and thought, 'How can I play that on the guitar?' The first one I learned was *Cherry Blossom Pink*, an Eddie Calvert hit played on trumpet. Then I tried to play a few solos on the skiffle we did and then when we started playing rock 'n' roll, I listened to the radio and had some ideas, and if I had an idea in my head I tried to work it out. I found if I could sing it, I could try to play it – sometimes with success, sometimes not. But gradually it got me moving around the fingerboard and learning how to get my fingers moving in an orderly fashion. But I still don't know anything about things like tab. It was just by listening, 'trial and error' and if it worked it worked, if not try again. I still wasn't really aware of things like scales, diminished chords and all that – didn't have a clue, in fact I don't think people used them in rock 'n' roll then so it didn't matter!"

Indeed, there were precious few theory books around back then, and much of what Hank picked up was by almost by accident...

"We obviously were playing solos using the pentatonic scale, but without realising it or knowing the names of things. I think there were a lot of people like me in the same boat – we couldn't afford lessons so it was just a case of listening to the radio, buying a couple of records, and trying to work things out. The solos and riffs – we probably missed out some of the subtleties of the chords and so on – but that was just how you learned."

The new album features Hank's take on *Peter Gunn*, a track that already has some serious instrumental music pedigree...

"I remember when I first heard the Duane Eddy version I thought, 'Oh, wow, what is that?' That slightly jazzy melody line – great stuff! I always loved it, but always wanted to perform it.

"Another piece I've always wanted to do was the *Baby Elephant Walk* so my son Ben and I decided to do it as a mash – I hope we've done it justice. Ben and I had written together in the past, so we messed around with a few ideas and came up with something. The *Russian Doll* idea came from thinking about a tune that had some kind of atmosphere of Russia about it the minor, you know – the Volga Boatmen!'"

"I've always loved the Julie London, Barney Kessel version of *Cry Me A River*. It's a great tune, very bluesy. I thought let's do something with a different feel and we came up with this very basic, bass and it seemed to work with the tune so we thought that's the way we'll take it. Having listened to it I did think I wish I'd been a bit more adventurous having established the tune in getting away from it but it does have a solo in it, so I left it."

All in the family

When it came to recording the album's parts, Hank and Ben kept things very collaborative, and of course, it starts with guitar...

"Ben and I put the routines down on the things we are working on together, which was pretty much everything," Hank notes. "We put it on Logic just as a basic track to work with, then we transfer it onto Pro Tools and Ben puts down his acoustic and then I put my guitar on and we put the bass and drums on. Real drums with the odd sample. Then we added keyboard and percussion. Live sax as well from Paul Millard – I really like the honking sax at the end of *Peter Gunn*."

> "If I had an idea in my head, I tried to work it out. I found that if I could sing it, I could try to play it"

It wouldn't be a Hank Marvin interview without some talk of Strats, and he's gone back to an old favourite on the pickup front...

"For the Cliff and the Shads reunion album, I changed from Kinman pickups to Fender '54 reissues," Hank explains. "On this album, some of the tracks have those and some have Kinman's stacked humbuckers. Because with the normal Fender-type pickups you have to find the 'null point' – the point in the studio with the minimum hum. With the Kinman's you don't get this problem."

A key facet of Hank's early sound were seriously heavy strings, and while he's eased back, his set-up isn't for the faint hearted...

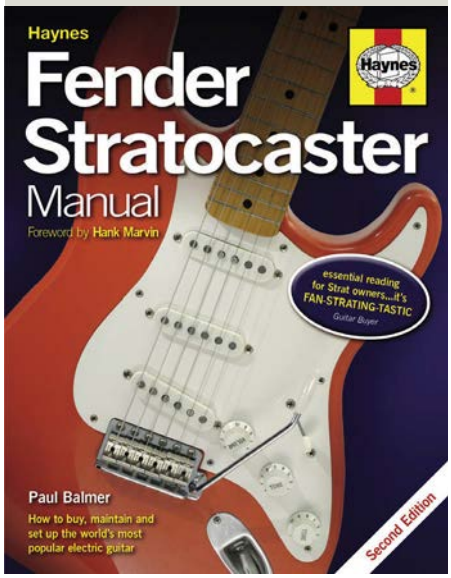
"It's wound 3rd (strings), yes. My early strings were 0.013s. Now I'm using 0.011s. A wound 3rd will certainly have that bigger sound of the early Shadows records. Not as easy to play but it's important. The Easy-Mute trem arm also helps, and I've found that when I went to the traditional bridge, it seems to stay in tune – and it looks great. Also a Teflon nut helps stop the strings sticking, I used to be always putting graphite in bone ones. I also like the Sperzel locking machine heads – and they make for very quick restringing. I like the action not high but not too low. You get a good quality of tone when not too high but not low enough to buzz."

With more than a half century in music behind him, Hank has a few choice words for those just starting out...

"First of all really enjoy yourself and what you're doing – the fact you can make music," He enthuses. "Secondly if you want to get more enjoyment out of it, really learn to play the instrument as best you can. Don't expect things to happen overnight, it takes time. I love it when people just want to sing or play, and if success comes because of the passion and love of doing it, that's great!"

SORT YOUR STRAT OUT

Our *G&B* interviewer Paul Balmer worked with Hank Marvin many times during his time as a BBC Engineer and producer and Hank provided a foreword to his *Haynes Fender Stratocaster Manual*, which has recently been reissued in paperback. This includes a thorough 'strip down' of a '57 Fiesta Red Strat and an examination of Hank's early use of echo effects and Vox AC15s.



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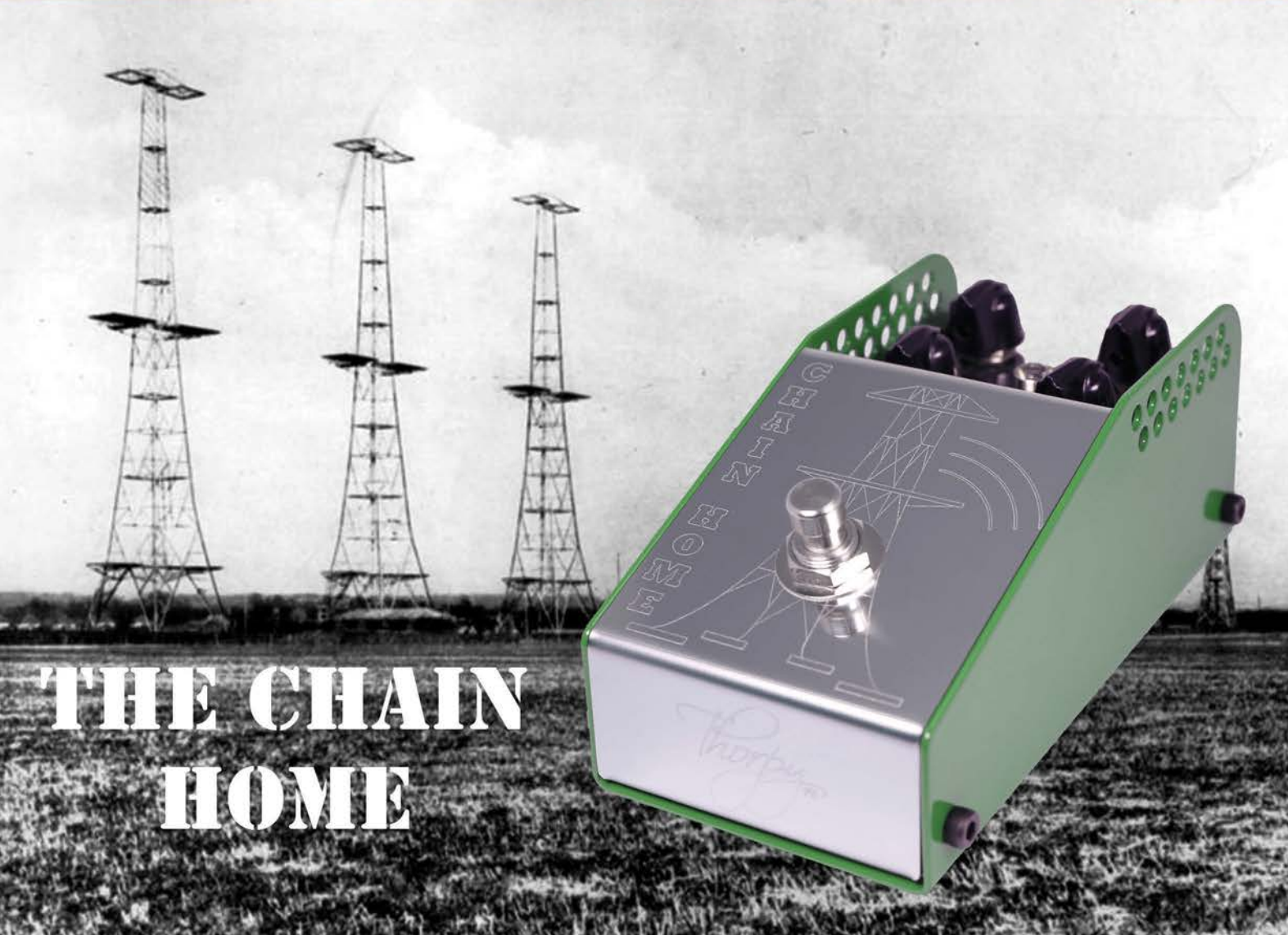
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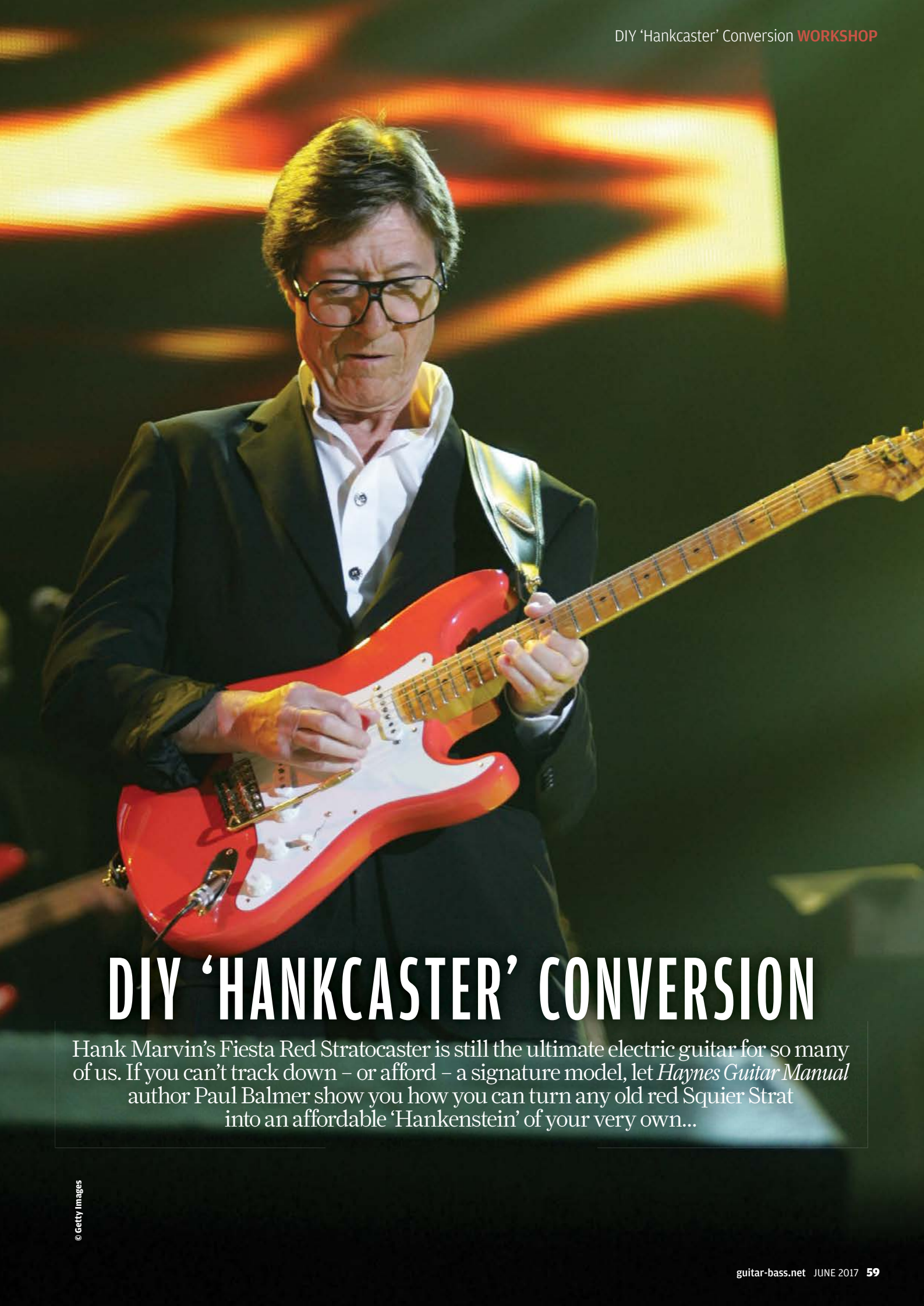

DIY 'HANKCASTER' CONVERSION

Hank Marvin's Fiesta Red Stratocaster is still the ultimate electric guitar for so many of us. If you can't track down – or afford – a signature model, let *Haynes Guitar Manual* author Paul Balmer show you how you can turn any old red Squier Strat into an affordable 'Hankenstein' of your very own...

© Getty Images

1 We've used a Squier Hank Marvin model from the early 90s as our base model guitar, but any Fiesta Red S-type will do the job just fine

2 To retain a vintage vibe the single-ply pickguard is already 1959-appropriate. The vintage-type bridge with pressed steel saddles are a Hank favourite (though this one should be in gold for proper early Shadows authenticity), but the accompanying 'low mass' economy vibrato block is worth replacing

3 Mass helps sustain and a cold-rolled steel block or even a brass one is a good choice as a replacement

In 1959 Cliff Richard bought Hank Marvin a Fender Stratocaster with gold-plated hardware – some say the first to reach UK shores. That thoughtful gift helped propel Cliff's backing band 'The Drifters' to become The Shadows – Britain's most successful instrumental group. Hank was Britain's first home-grown guitar hero and that Fiesta Red icon launched a thousand guitar careers. From Merseyside to Essex, Manchester to Shetland guitarists all wanted *that* guitar!

This Hank Marvin Signature Squier, made in Japan as a limited edition in 1991-2 is a useful starting point, you'll find one on Reverb or eBay for around about £500. But any Fiesta Red maple neck Strat will create a similar visual impression.

Hank appreciates that guitar technology has moved on since 1959, and so he retrofits his Strats with Sperzel locking tuners and the Easy-mute vibrato arm. That said he also clearly feels that not all innovations are good ones, as he's moved back to vintage-style pressed steel saddles and 50s pickups over more modern alternatives. Above all, Hank is pragmatic about his gear, so we're going to suggest some adoptions for a real performing guitar.

The Squier has chrome hardware so the most obvious cosmetic change is to go gold. These are obtainable from most suppliers, but we suggest going for quality, as some 'gold' parts are very thinly plated and soon wear through. For this project we've used Stew Mac, as though not perhaps the cheapest they do offer consistent quality.

4 Hank currently prefers locking Sperzel tuners for tuning stability, but as the Squier is routed for Gotohs, the locking gold version by the same brand would do the job without any complex woodwork adjustment

5 All of the screws will need changing to gold ones, including the machine screws for the pickup selector and pickup height adjustment – these come in metric and imperial threads so make sure you get the right ones

6 The pickup covers here have aged nicely so we should keep those

7 The signed headstock is naturally a must for the hardcore Hank fan

8 The most urgent 'playability' issue with this guitar is its worn frets. It has been well used and will soon need a complete refret. In an attempt to keep costs down, we're going to try for a final dress of the existing frets as a short term solution

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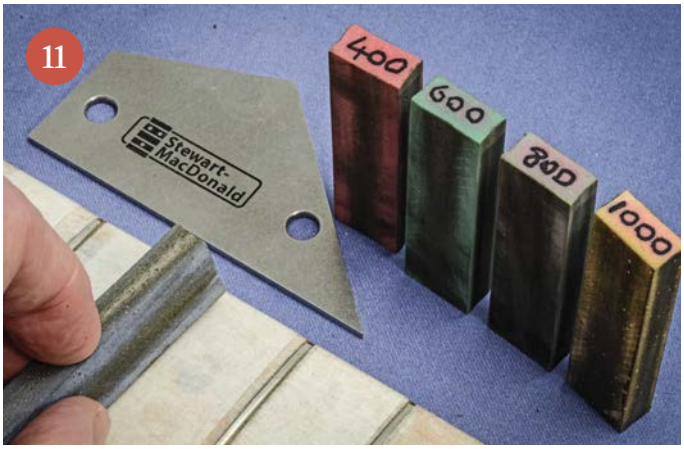
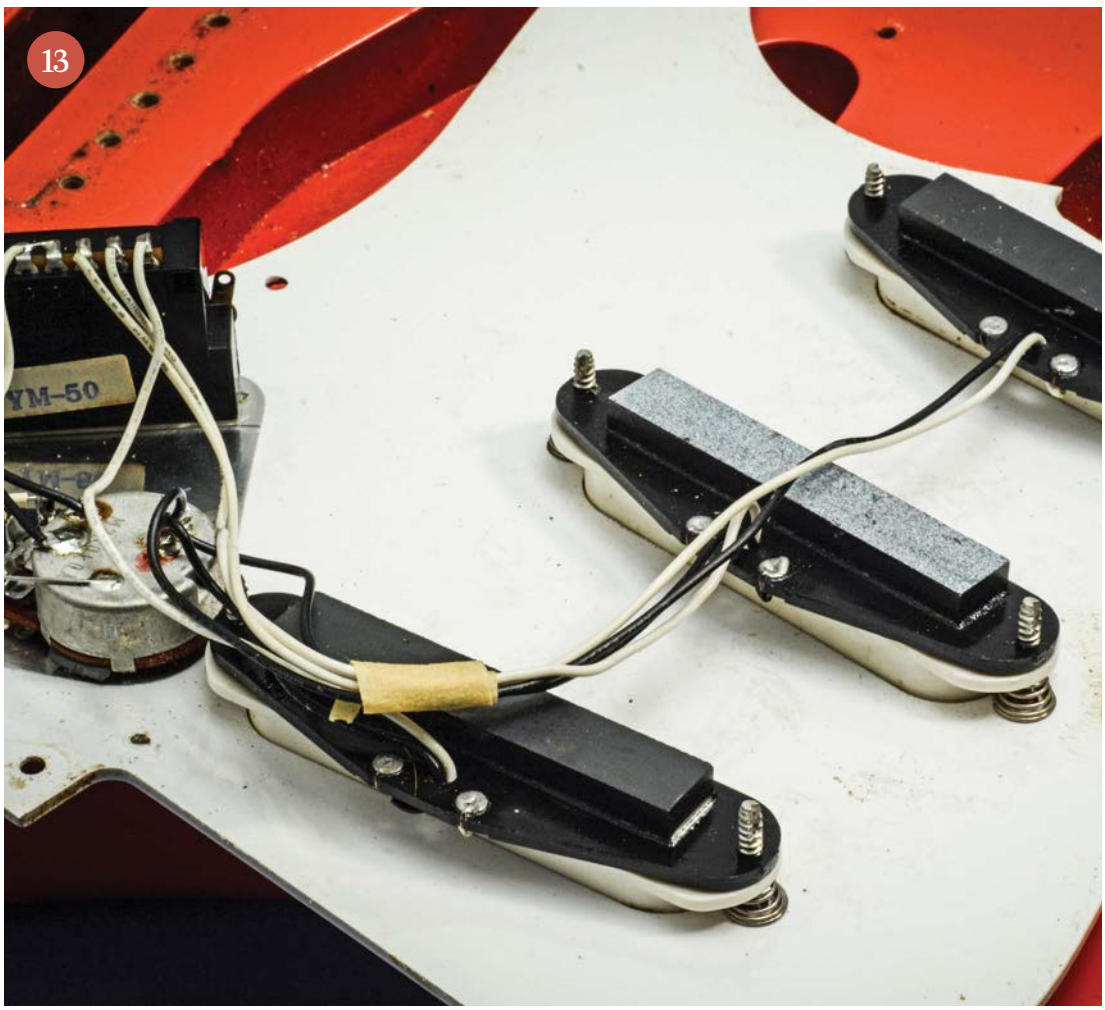




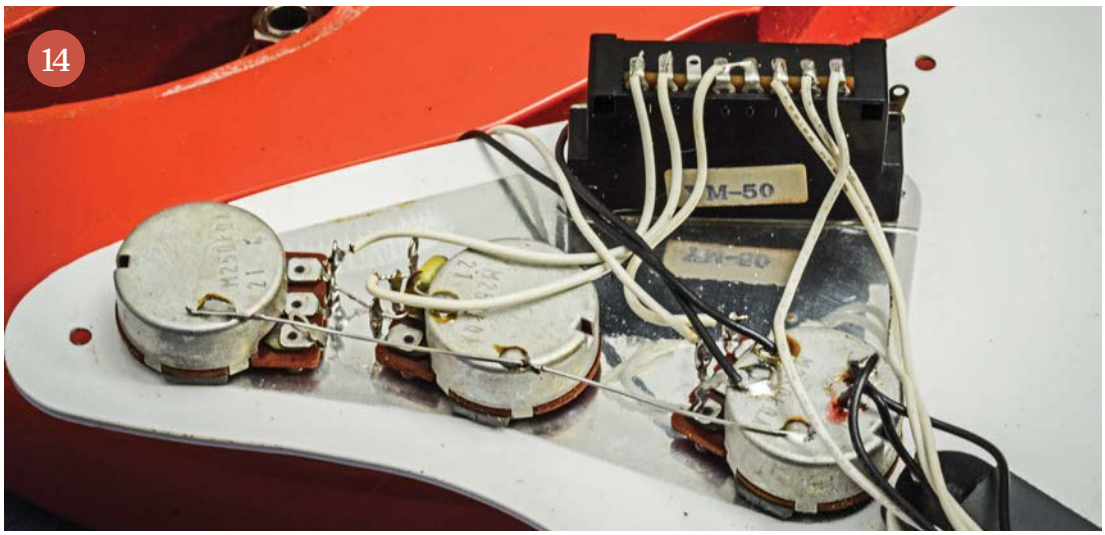
9 We use a 'diamond dust' file to lose the pits in the frets, while low tack masking tape protects the maple fingerboard

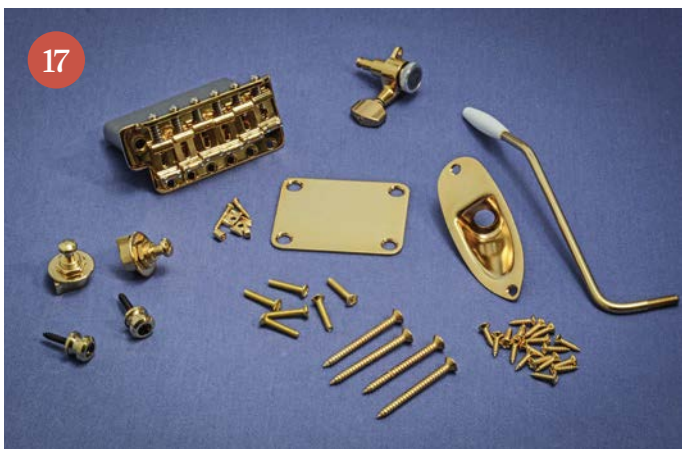
10 The next step is to re-shape the frets with a hollow ground fret file

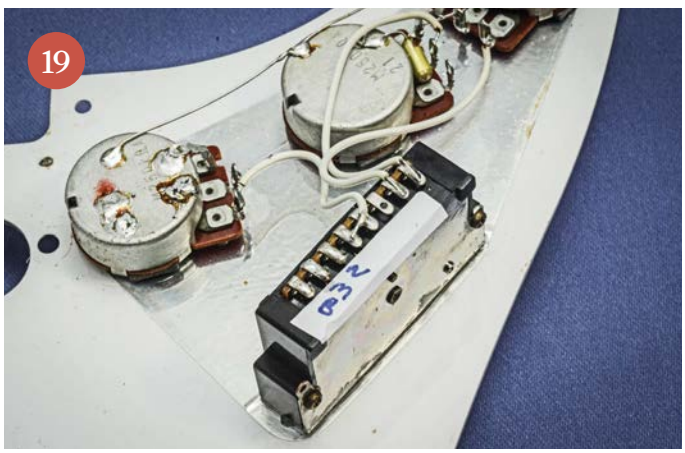
11 Next up we're going to polish the frets with a series of 'fret erasers' – working from 200 grit to 1,000 grit

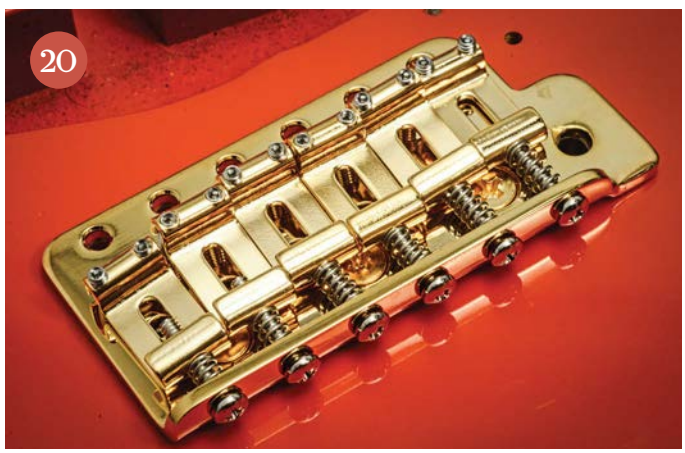
12 The neck pocket on the guitar reveals the HM designation on neck and body, suggesting this is in fact the limited edition guitar. The serial number also backs this up

13 The pickups are economy 'bar magnet' types and we would suggest replacing them with more vintage-correct units for a more authentic *Apache* sound, such as the Stew Mac Golden Age units we're installing here









14 Again to keep costs down, we're ignoring the economy five-way switch – ideally we'd replace this with a more substantial Oak Grigsby, but this works perfectly well as is. The pots also work fine and are full-size not the undesirabale economy micro units

15 We recommend the using JIS screwdrivers (Japanese industrial standard), as these work really well on Japanese guitars and have a secure grip

16 The gold Gotoh locking tuners are a direct replacement avoiding any routing or filling. As this guitar was a limited edition of 1,500 it does increase its value over a regular Squier, so keep the original parts for proof of provenance if you're selling it. Japanese Squiers of this era are highly prized generally

17 Here are the replacement parts from Stew Mac – they are all the correct specification and should drop into place without difficulty

18 The Golden Age pickups are designed to emulate the sound of classic 50s single coils with a little extra screening to reduce the hum induction often associated with these early designs

19 The wax 'push back' wire is practical as well as authentic in appearance. Careful labelling ensures an easy 'like for like' rewiring to the five-way switch. We're using the original pickup covers which have an authentic amount of UV damage – resulting in a yellow tint to the exposed plastic

20 The correct spec vibrato assembly is a simple replacement however for an authentic 'early Hank' sound you will need a substantial steel vibrato block with five springs to counter the tension of medium gauge strings with a wound third >

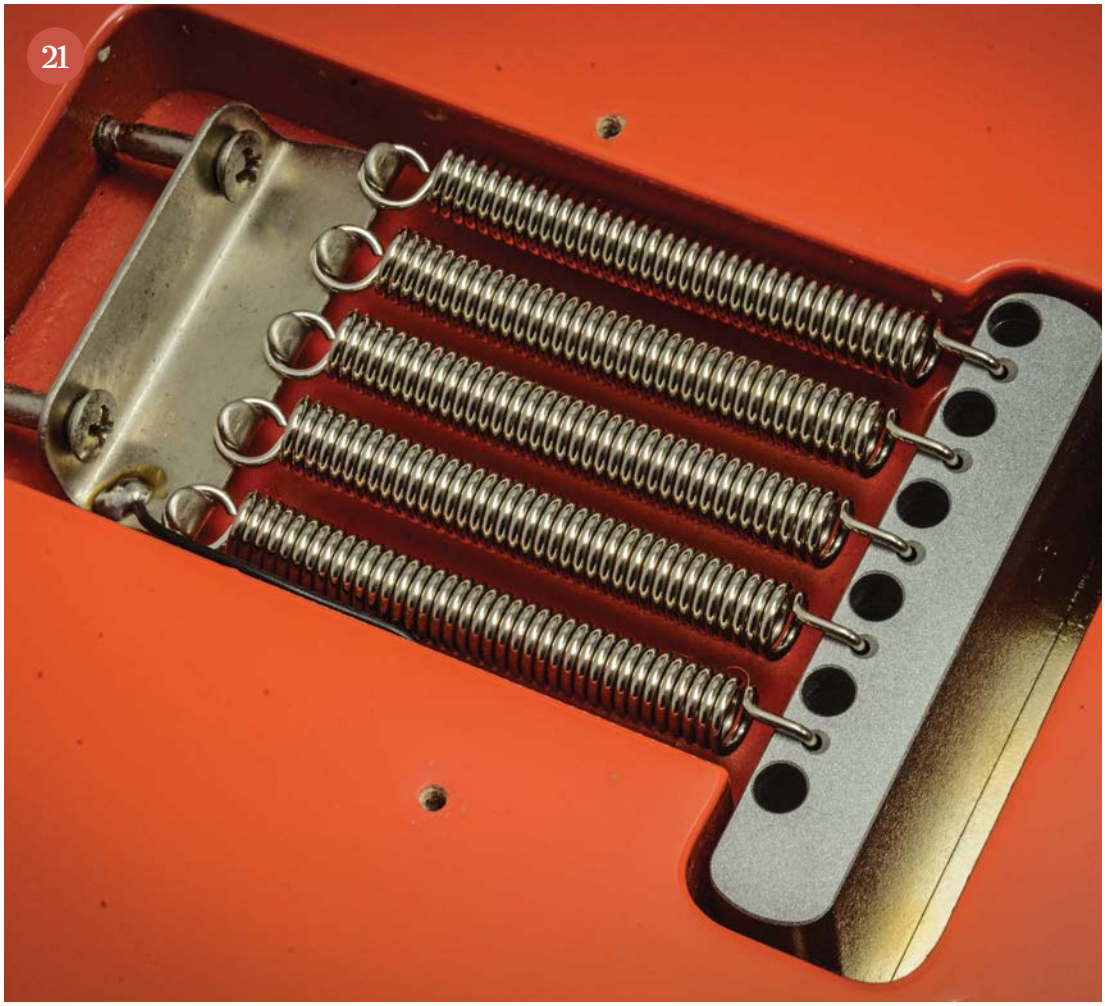
21 We're keeping things stiff with all five springs on the vibrato. We'll be starting out with some 0.011 to 0.052 strings

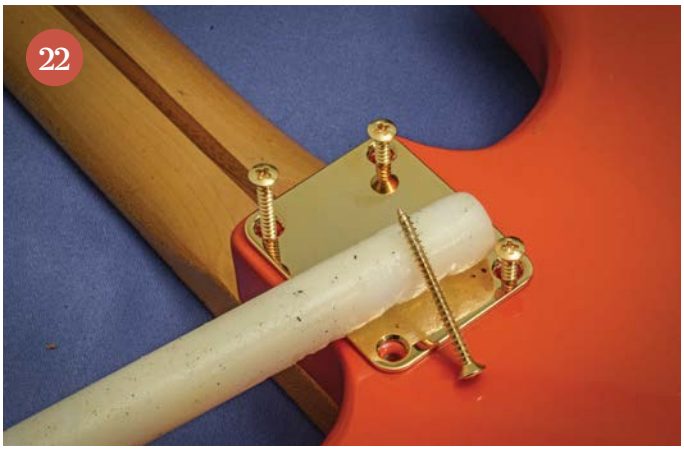
22 We strongly recommend applying a little candle wax on the thread of the four neck woodscrews – an old joiners' trick – 'easier' joints and less splitting timber!

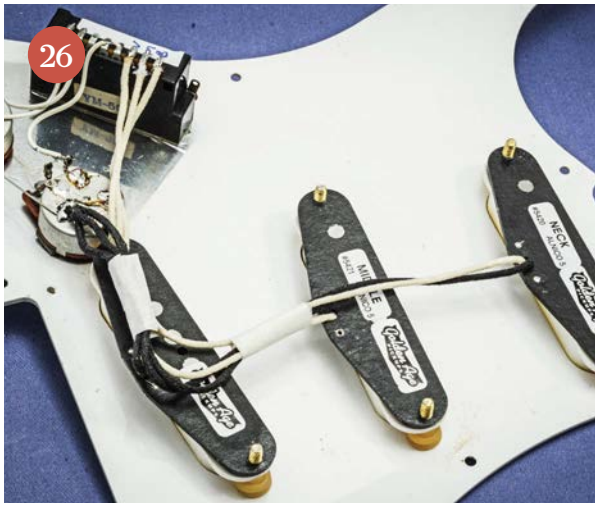
23 A felt washer on Hank's favoured strap locks is a nice 'old school' touch on a modern requirement

24 The Gotoh locking tuners have staggered heights for more downward pressure on the nut at the treble strings – the green coded ones have the shorter shafts

25 Hank prefers a VML Easy-mute vibrato arm on his guitars and again be careful of the thread – the Gotoh trem block we're using has a 10/32-inch pre-metric thread – but VML supply any thread you need including unthreaded types. This simple modification makes playing the palm mute sections of *Wonderful Land* a lot easier







26 The Golden Age pickups are one option for Shadows sounds with wax-potted AWG42 coil windings and alnico V staggered polepieces

27 The bridge pickup has a slightly hotter 7.6K ohms winding and they all have an extra layer of screening, which you can disconnect if required. The supplied latex washers are easier to fit and provide better acoustic isolation than modern steel springs. Hank also employs custom Kinman pickups in many of his stage Stratocasters, so there's plenty of choice depending on which signature 'Hank' sound you are after

28 With radically different strings, a new bridge and a fret dress to accommodate, the guitar needed a comprehensive set-up. You can refer to back issues of *Guitar & Bass* or the *Haynes Stratocaster Manual* for all the information you will need and your 'Hankcaster' will be ready to gig! We have to say the finished guitar looks great, plays well and sounds fantastic – we're really tempted to perform these mods on our own USA '57 reissue, too! Thank you to Steve Byrne for the loan of the guitar.

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Gear Reviews

This month's reviews section runs the rule over a tasty array of new guitar gear from bespoke boutique and custom creations to affordable amps. There's also a digital plugin that promises to deliver 1950s guitar tones in your home or studio recording set-up. Read on and drool...

Gibson Custom Made 2 Measure 1956 Les Paul Heavy Aged **68**
Stunning Bigsby-equipped Les Paul that tips its hat to Neil Young's most famous sidekick

Asher Guitars Marc Ford Signature **72**
High-end US boutique maker creates unique guitar for the former Black Crowes guitarist

Loïc Le Pape Steel Junior **74**
Droolsome aged hollowbody steel electric from the French artist, engineer and luthier

Atkin Guitars The Forty Three **76**
Alister Atkin goes down the aged acoustic guitar rabbithole and comes out with an absolute blinder

Carr Mercury V **80**
The US boutique amp maker updates its popular, versatile and incredibly tonesome Mercury combo

Fender '57 Custom Pro-Amp **84**
Continuing our tweed theme this month, we take a look at one of Fender's latest vintage reissues

Blackstar LT-Echo 10 & Fly 3 Bluetooth **89**
A new wallet-friendly practice amp and a revolutionary mini-amp is enhanced with Bluetooth connectivity

Dwarfcraft Devices Effects **90**
Three high-end stompboxes from the US maker – the Happiness, Twin Stags & Eau Claire Thunder

UAD Fender '55 Deluxe **92**
Highly evolved plugin recreation of a classic tweed Fender amp for your digital audio workstation

PHANTOM
TREBLE
Bigsby
PATENT
No.D-169120

Gibson Custom Made 2 Measure 1956 Les Paul Heavy Aged

Will **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** be helpless to resist this Old Black-inspired electric with the heart of a Goldtop and the damage already done?

When we were hunting for a suitable electric guitar to accompany the 1959 Fender 5E3 Deluxe that graces the cover of this month's tweed extravaganza, it seemed rude not to pay tribute to one of the most recognisable and vicious-sounding tweed rigs of them all. Although not an official artist model, this 1956 Les Paul Heavy Aged was ordered through Gibson Custom's Made 2 Measure program by the guys at Coda Music in Stevenage as an homage to Neil Young's long-serving LP known as 'Old Black'.

Old Black has been heavily modified over the years – believed to be a '53, it was spray-painted black before Young acquired it in a trade from Buffalo Springfield bandmate Jim Messina. A Bigsby tailpiece was already in place in time for the recording of *Cowgirl In The Sand* with Crazy Horse in January 1969, while a Firebird mini-humbucker was added to the bridge position – replacing a short-lived DeArmond Dynasonic – in 1972. Some have speculated that the guitar was re-necked in the 1960s and it has also been modified with a 'direct out' switch to bypass the onboard potentiometers and caps, and hit the front end of the amp as hard as possible.

Lacking both the bypass switch and the aluminium plates on Young's guitar, our review guitar stops short of being a full replica but nevertheless manages to channel the spirit of Old Black within the realms of the options offered by the Made 2 Measure process. Rather than being modelled on a '53, it utilises another Goldtop as the 'base' model – the Historic 1956 Les Paul Goldtop Reissue, aka the R6.

Standard 'R6' specifications include a hide-glue neck join, a vintage-correct neck tenon that extends into the neck pickup cavity and a Historic truss-rod assembly with no tubing. The fretwire here is a little fatter than vintage and Gibson's current Bumble Bee tone capacitors aren't the old-school paper-in-oil type but it seems a little churlish to complain about either transgression when the guitar is a slinky player that sounds very good indeed, but more on that shortly.

The Ebony gloss nitrocellulose finish may not be as gouged and worn as Young's guitar, but there's still extensive faux playing wear here: we have simulated rub-through to the bare wood around the back, in the forearm area on the top and along the fingerboard >

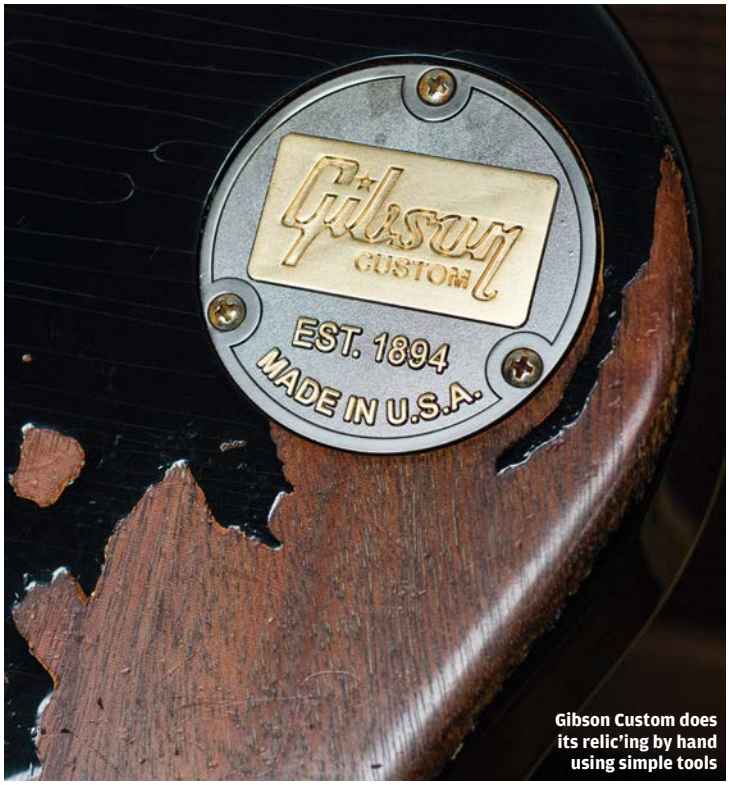
This is one of those guitars that encourages you to push the boundaries of your abilities a little harder

The Heavy Aged finish features simulated forearm wear and lacquer checking

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £5,699 (inc aged Gibson hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Single-cutaway solidbody electric guitar. Made in USA
- **BUILD** Solid mahogany body with maple cap, set mahogany neck with rounded 50s profile and 12-inch radius rosewood fingerboard. 22 medium-jumbo frets. Nylon nut
- **HARDWARE** Kluson Deluxe vintage-style tuners, ABR-1 tune-o-matic bridge, Bigbsy B7 vibrato tailpiece
- **ELECTRICS** Gibson Custom Firebird mini-humbucker (bridge) and soapbar P-90 (neck), three-way toggle pickup selector, 2x volume, 2x tone
- **SCALE LENGTH** 24.75"/629mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.6mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 22.7mm at nut, 25.2mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.9mm at nut, 50.8mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 9.6lbs/4.3kg
- **FINISH** Heavy Aged Ebony nitrocellulose
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
  www.coda-music.com
  www.gibson.com

A nylon nut helps keep tuning stable and friction low, even with Bigsby abuse



Gibson Custom does its relic'ing by hand using simple tools

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
The **Fano Standard SP6 £1,899** is a drop-dead cool collision of Telecaster and single-cut Les Paul Special stylings available in a distressed Bull Black nitrocellulose finish. Another aged single-cut worthy of your attention is the **Eastman Antique Varnish Series SB59/V £1,769** – it was last month's cover star and can be seen and heard in action at youtube.com/theguitarmagazine. Finally, for a variation on a theme with a different G-brand on its headstock, the **Gretsch Custom Shop 1956 G6128 Duo Jet Relic £3,810** is a thing of wonder from Stephen Stern and his team.

binding on the treble and bass sides of the neck. While visiting its Nashville factory, we've witnessed Gibson Custom employees hand-ageing instruments; while their surprisingly primitive tools and processes can produce results that look a little stylised next to a vintage example, the various dings and razor-cut lacquer checking here makes for an appealing overall look that will bed in nicely when the guitar finds a permanent home and the owner adds some real-life road wear of their own.

The various dings and razor-cut lacquer checking will bed in nicely when its owner adds some real-life road wear

In Use

As usual, a nicely rounded 50s-style Gibson neck instantly feels like 'home' for this writer but fans of slimmer profiles shouldn't be intimidated – it's no monster and, in combination with the aforementioned medium-jumbo fretwire, this is a real joy to play and one of those guitars that encourages you to push the boundaries of your abilities a little harder. Bigsby sceptics fear not; the proximity of the B7's tension bar to the ABR-1 creates a similar break angle across the bridge to that of a stop tailpiece, while the nylon nut helps reduce friction and keep tuning solid, even with vigorous whammy bar use.

Plugged into a tweed Deluxe and with a Strymon Flint supplying additional ambience it's nigh-on impossible to resist the pull of desolate, cinematic atmospherics in the vein of Neil Young's *Dead Man* soundtrack or the abrasive electric guitar work of Daniel Lanois. As you would hope when playing an instrument in this price bracket, there's a world of inspiration here and for the right player it's hard not to lose hours just drinking in the possibilities unlocked by this guitar.

Getting the choice of amplifier right is key, too. The complex harmonics, easy musical feedback and touch dynamics of a small tweed allow you to go from sweet to savage just by varying picking-hand intensity. Through an amp with a scooped, blackface-style midrange, the mini-humbucker at the bridge can sound a little brash and scratchy, but the chewy mids of a tweed suits it perfectly. Flipping up to the middle or neck settings on the three-way toggle switch introduces an extra helping of bass but we're not talking mud here, there's sugar and cream and it's all very more-ish, particularly with lashings of spring reverb and judicious use of the Bigsby arm.

Rolling back the onboard volume controls to clean things up introduces a hollower, funkier, more Fender-like tonality that works really well for soul-influenced playing. In the middle setting, there's a real sweet spot with the bridge pickup's volume set wide open and the neck knocked back around a notch and a half. You can hear the extended bass of the neck pickup take a back seat rather abruptly as you turn down the volume and the resulting tone is a fantastic, chiming platform for well, almost anything. It rewards the extra subtlety of fingers rather than a pick, too.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Extremely cool aesthetics with tones and playability to match
+ Proves how versatile a platform a Les Paul can be
- Gibson still makes some incredibly inspiring guitars, but they certainly don't come cheap

Almost certainly less cantankerous and easier to handle than the real thing, you don't have to be a Neil Young devotee to get an awful lot from this bespoke beauty

8/10

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Asher Marc Ford Signature

A star guitar from California that melds classic Strat and LP Special influences. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** finds out if you can have your cake and eat it...

Asher Guitars & Lap Steels is a family business based in the Venice Beach area of sunny Los Angeles, California, and is headed up by master luthier, Bill Asher. With decades of experience building and maintaining instruments for the likes of Jackson Browne, Ben Harper and plenty more besides, Asher was the man that former Black Crowe, solo artist and mighty fine guitarist Marc Ford turned to a few years ago when he was looking for a custom instrument that combined the tone and vibe of his Les Paul Special with the ergonomics of his go-to Stratocaster.

The resulting mash up of Strat and TV Special influences – now available here in the UK thanks to Coda Music – is a hugely pleasing one, and the choice of amp-style aluminium skirt knobs and aged nickel pickup covers alongside a three-ply parchment scratchplate looks coolly retro without straying into over-kitsch territory.

The satin-finished, subtly-flamed rock maple neck has a gorgeous deep D profile that borders on a V with its appealing lack of shoulder. The fingerboard edges are broken for comfort and its rich red flashes add a touch of exotica. The 12-inch 'board radius and Dunlop 6155 fretwire make for a creamy and expressive playing experience all the way up the neck, while the lightweight West African okoume body is a snug fit, too, thanks to the presence of Strat-style forearm and ribcage contours.

Locking Hipshot tuners and an easy-access truss-rod adjustment wheel are reminders that this instrument has been developed for the road. The Callaham vintage Strat-style vibrato is among the very best of its type and provides a smooth ride, although it does take a while for our review sample's tuning to settle down.

There's an enormous amount of fun to be had with this guitar simply by manipulating its volume control

In Use

Plugging the Asher into a Celestion Blue-equipped 1959 5E3 amplifier, there's an enormous amount of fun to be had by simply manipulating the guitar's volume control. Tones range from pretty, dynamic clean sounds and harmonically rich jangle with an almost acoustic-like texture through to raucous, biting rock.

It's in overdrive land that the ToneStyler switch really comes in handy with an array of vocal-sounding treble roll-offs that can be used to help lead tones find space in a dense mix, or thicken up those naturally bright and percussive Arcane P-90s as and when necessary.

As you might very well expect, this guitar won't take you all the way into springy Strat or snarling LP Special territory. However, it has bold shades of both among a range of high-dollar tones that excel for rootsy rock 'n' roll playing and sound like absolute dynamite in combination with an old tweed amp.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Dennis Fano's Novo Serus J (**£2,999**) combines a pair of excellent Amalfitano P-90s with a sumptuously playable neck and the ever-smooth Mastery Vibrato. The **Music Man Valentine** (**£2,449**) is another fine player with a gorgeous neck and versatile electronics. For more of a set-neck LP Special vibe, check out the **Echopark Downtowner Deluxe TV Yellow** (**£4,499**)

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Top drawer appointments throughout
+ Fabulous neck
+ Versatile range of high-quality tones
+ Light weight and great balance

– Post-Brexit pound crash makes the price even more premium

A nicely refined, vintage-influenced electric with the tonal diversity to cover a varied set

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Asher Marc Ford Signature

- **PRICE** £3,999 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway solidbody electric. Made in USA
- **BUILD** One-piece contoured okoume body, quartersawn rock maple neck with ebony headstock fascia and 12" radius pau ferro fingerboard with 22 Dunlop 6155 frets and bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Hipshot locking chrome tuners, Callaham vintage-style vibrato bridge
- **ELECTRICS** 2x Arcane Sweet 90 P-90 pickups, three-way blade pickup selector switch, master volume, tone, 11-position ToneStyler switch (offers 11 EQ curves from true-bypass to 0.022µF)
- **SCALE LENGTH** 25.5"/648mm
- **NECK WIDTH** 43.2mm at nut, 51.7mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 23.6mm at 1st fret, 25.0mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 33.6mm at nut, 52.3mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.3lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** TV Yellow nitrocellulose (as reviewed), Cherry Red, Tobacco Burst
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815 **www.coda-music.com**

Loïc Le Pape Steel Junior

The passion that French artist, engineer and luthier Loïc Le Pape has for his craft has translated into achingly desirable guitars. **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** steels himself...

We met Loïc Le Pape at the Holy Grail Guitar Show back in September 2016 and were instantly transfixed by the '1946' model he'd brought along to the boutique guitar expo in Berlin. If you imagine a B&G Little Sister made by James Trussart, then you'd be thinking along the right lines. There seems to be something about working with metal that appeals to French luthiers as, aside from monsieurs Le Pape et Trussart, the guys at Burgundy-based company MeloDuende Guitars count The Reverend Billy F Gibbons and Rival Sons' Scott Holiday among the happy customers who rock their aluminium-bodied instruments.

Like his legendary countryman Trussart, Le Pape builds guitars primarily from steel and wood and the example we have here is one of several of his instruments available from Macari's in London. Obviously inspired by a double-cut Les Paul Junior, this example has a distressed hollow steel body with a pair of wooden internal supports beneath the bridge studs. By connecting the top to the back, this helps minimise feedback so that you only get the controllable, musical kind with sensible gain levels at stage volumes. A special anti-corrosion coating means that the guitar won't get any rustier or mark your pristine gigging attire any time soon.

The neck is a more familiar mahogany affair that, aside from being nicely aged at the headstock and heel, has a super-comfortable 'rounded 59' C profile with a thin lacquer finish – it won't take much playing time to develop the 'comfortable shoes' feel of an old favourite. Played acoustically, the combination of an unbleached bone nut and wrapover bridge produces a nice mixture of sweetness and snap with a metallic hollow-body ambience that bodes very well for the Steel Junior's amplified tone, and – as is the case with wraparound bridges more often than not, if we're honest – at no point is our enjoyment hampered by intonation issues. This junkyard dog was built to snarl, so let's plug in...

The steel body and P-90 pickup give the instrument a 'giant microphone' feel

In Use

The steel body and P-90 pickup give the instrument a 'giant microphone' feel where the whole instrument is alive and amplified but within the realms of classic rock 'n' roll and R&B, handling noise isn't intrusive. In fact, it helps the guitar deliver more of an old-time vibe. Despite the presence of steel and air where mahogany would usually be, there's no lack of tonal woodiness – it's responsive, dynamic and outrageously good fun, doing all the things a good Junior should in the process, whether that's raunchy slide, ballsy rock 'n' roll riffing, *Live At Leeds* or a dead-on Keef impression in open G.

Back the volume off into a driven amp and you can get acoustic-like textures but if you add a little spring reverb to cleaner amp tones there's some sweet chime for pretty arpeggios, too. Helpfully on this single-pickup instrument, the orange drop capacitor-equipped tone control's taper is well-judged, so you don't get an immediate dramatic roll-off. Instead there's more of a subtle softening of the high-end that's useful for removing a little edge and thickening chords. Great stuff.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Boutique style at a production line price point
+ Classic tones and feel
– Only the growing waiting list

Delivers everything you'd expect from a good old Junior and looks badass in the process. Excellent value, too!

9/10

KEY FEATURES

Loïc Le Pape Steel Junior

- **PRICE** £1,599 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** Double-cutaway electric guitar. Made in France
- **BUILD** Hollow steel body, 'rounded 59 C' profile mahogany neck with 12-inch radius rosewood fingerboard, 22 medium frets, unbleached bone nut
- **HARDWARE** Distressed Gotoh wraparound aluminium bridge and vintage-style three-on-a-plate tuners with white plastic buttons
- **ELECTRICS** 1x Kent Armstrong P-90 pickup with master volume and tone controls
- **SCALE LENGTH** 629mm/24.75"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42.1mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
- **NECK DEPTH** 20.3mm at nut, 23.8mm at 12th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35.1mm at nut, 52.1mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 7.3lb/3.3kg
- **FINISH** Rusty distressed (see website for more options)
- **CONTACT** Macari's 0207 836 2856 **macaris.co.uk** **loiclepapesteelguitars.com**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

The **SteelDeville** **£3,995** is **James Trussart**'s take on a metal-bodied Les Paul and comes in a variety of finishes and configurations. **MeloDuende**'s **Dusty Valentine** follows a double-cut outline but features an aeronautical-grade aluminium body and many custom options. Enquire via www.meloduende.fr – prices typically range between **€2,500-3,500**

Atkin Guitars The Forty Three

Faux distress isn't for everybody, but in the case of Alister Atkin's Buddy Holly-inspired dreadnought it's more than skin deep. **HUW PRICE** discovers that it's a slippery slope...

Artificially aged guitars have become commonplace in the electric market in the last two decades, but the opposite is true for acoustics. This writer's one previous encounter with a relic'd acoustic was inauspicious, to say the least, but times they are a-changin' – as evidenced by Canterbury-based luthier Alister Atkin's slope-shouldered dreadnought, The Forty Three. Rather than content himself with a straight-ahead vintage Gibson J-45 clone, Atkin's aim was "to capture the aura of a guitar that has been played for the last 70 years".

Atkin began distressing finishes by chance when building a limited run of J-45 replicas for the Buddy Holly Foundation. One of the guitars accidentally picked up a ding so Atkin figured 'why not' and set about copying the extensive play wear on Holly's original. Originally intended as a one off, customers who saw the guitar soon began placing orders for relic'd finishes of their own.

Not all aged guitars are created equal but Atkin takes a holistic approach. Of course you get extensive lacquer checking and tinted lacquer over the bindings, but look inside and you'll see dust on the back and the braces. Even the label looks a bit 'tired'.

Digging deeper we learn that Atkin uses a different formulation of lacquer for those guitars destined for relicing and the thickness is reduced because up to 33 per cent less nitro is sprayed. Although Atkin's website doesn't make a big deal of it, the sitka spruce top is roasted. The process, also known as torrefaction, releases moisture from the wood and crystallizes the resins.

It's argued the same things will happen to spruce over six decades, but after torrefaction, when the originals may have shrunk by up to 1/8-inch.

The result is a guitar that has a more 'vintage' voicing, but is more stable structurally, too. However Atkin is no slave to the vintage aesthetic because he incorporates a two-way truss rod and uses a two-bolt method for neck joints that's similar to that used by Collings. Since Atkin's clients include a number of pro players, ease of repair is considered as crucial as tone.

The guitar has a 'vintage' voicing but is more structurally stable, too – Atkin is no slave to the vintage aesthetic

Atkin's method reduces this process to about 60 minutes. He also freezes the wood, with the intention of helping his guitars achieve a matured and played-in tone from the get go, and eliminating any potential shrinkage in the timber. This is why the top plates are jointed

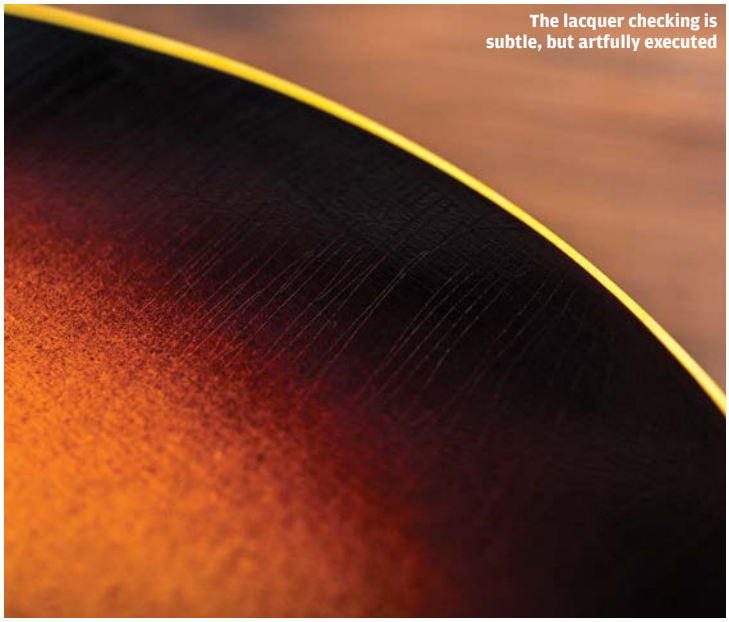
Fixtures and fittings include a bone nut and saddle, bone bridge >

The hardware is meticulously aged, including the three-on-a-plate tuners

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £2,999 (inc hard case)
- **DESCRIPTION** All-solid 6-string acoustic. Made in the UK
- **BUILD** Solid torrefied sitka spruce top with solid mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck, rosewood bridge and fingerboard, ebony peghead overlay, 14-fret neck join, scalloped bracing, vintage-style three-on-a-plate tuners, bone nut and saddle
- **ELECTRICS** N/A
- **LEFT-HANDERS** Yes
- **FINISH** Relic gloss nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 631.52mm/24 7/8"
- **NECK WIDTH** 42mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 36mm at nut, 55mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 1.875kg/4.13lbs
- **CONTACT** Forsyth's 0161 956 2052
  www.atkinguitars.com
  www.forsyths.co.uk

The 'banner' headstock decal is a tribute to the design that appeared on WWII-era Gibsons such as Buddy Holly's


The lacquer checking is subtle, but artfully executed

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Gibson's regular **J-45** reissue **£1,699** features the later 'backwards' belly bridge and an LR Baggs pickup system and the **True Vintage** version **£2,722** has a 'thermally treated' Adirondack spruce top. Other high-end options include the **Collings CJ £5,049** and the **Bourgeois Slope D £5,950**

pins and a set of appropriate 'no line' Kluson-style three-on-a-plate tuners. The tuners are artfully aged and have an encouragingly smooth and positive action, but we think unbleached bone might suit the overall aesthetic of this guitar a tad better.

Atkin informs us that the back and sides are Honduran mahogany and Indian rosewood is used for the fingerboard and bridge. The rosewood has a particularly beautiful colour and it's sanded and buffed to create a smooth vintage feel that further enhances the playing experience.

The celluloid pickguard with its soft bevelled edges is another classy touch. Atkin has them made in the US, each with a uniquely individual appearance. We're not certain if the headstock logos are decals or silk screened but they look utterly fantastic. The deep dark gold colour with subtle relicing is enhanced by lateral checking and grain sinkage.

In Use

Last month we looked at the Fairbanks F20-S – a recreation of the 1930s Gibson Nick Lucas model. Although the Fairbanks is a jewel of a guitar producing a very fine tone, there is nothing especially 'vintage' about its sound or feel. In contrast, in every department The Forty Three is one of the most convincing vintage-style acoustic guitars that this writer has ever encountered.

No doubt the looks would have a powerful influence on anyone's perception but the effect would be fleeting if the sound couldn't back it up. Based on our experience of various old Gibson guitars, we would say The Forty Three is eerily evocative.

Although it's a slope-shouldered variety of dreadnought, the bass is powerful but well proportioned and far from boomy. It has an enjoyable punchiness, but there's a woody and rounded quality to the notes rather than a cutting front end or a twangy bite. In a sense it's a similar story at the other end of the frequency range because The Forty Three is totally devoid of shrillness. There's more than enough brightness to provide clarity, but it's a sweetly dark sparkle rather that a cutting 'kerrchang'.

Based on our experience of various old Gibson guitars we would say The Forty Three's sound is eerily evocative

So instead of the classic scooped mid 'boom-chakka' dreadnought response, you get something far more refined and midrange focused. This contributes to outstanding string-to-string transitions and properly defined chord voicing. It also means The Forty Three is equally well suited to strumming and fingerpicking, so long as you're a picker who can deal with the string spacing.

The medium depth 'C' neck profile may be slimmer than an original's, but it contributes to the sense of old slipper comfort. When we first take this guitar out of its hard shell Hiscox case, country rhythm playing seems like the obvious place to start and we're rewarded with the kind of tones you've heard on countless classic records.

Moving onto fingerpicking, it's like the brooding hush you might get from Springsteen's solo work or the intimacy of early Davey Graham. The natural balance and compressed dynamics, combined with the rock-steady tuning and easy action, make it so easy to play.

You'll find dreads that are louder, brighter and more powerful, but this guitar wasn't designed for that. Instead Alister Atkin set out to replicate the look, feel and sound of a vintage 'banner' J-45 and we can report he has succeeded – and then some.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Vintage tone with wonderful contemporary playability
+ Extremely comfortable and familiar feel for J-45 lovers
+ Superb balance
+ Very accomplished relicing

– Nut and saddle look a bit too clean

Some vintage purists may argue Alister Atkin has taken a few liberties with this J-45 tribute, but where it matters, we think he has got it spectacularly right. A simply wonderful acoustic guitar

10/10

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CARR

Guitar & Bass AWARD CHOICE 9/10

Carr Mercury V

Billed as the British cousin of Carr's Skylark, the Mercury V is packed with features and is very different from previous models. **HUW PRICE** gets ready for lift off...

Long-standing readers may be aware that this is the third time a Carr Mercury has been reviewed in *G&B*, but on each occasion the amp itself has been somewhat different. The differences between the first two versions were relatively minor, with an EL34 power valve replacing the KT66 and a speaker swap. But besides the name and the similarity of the cabinet, the Mercury V is entirely different.

The biggest change is the power increase to 16 watts courtesy of a pair of 6V6s. Previously the best you could hope for was eight watts, but this isn't just for loud – the Mercury V still has built in attenuation. Fully bypassable and continually variable, it initially drops max power to four watts, then gradually rolls it down to 0.002-watts.

Equally significant is a completely reworked preamp section that is voiced for a raft of British tones. The preamp operates in two modes with the first inspired by the practice of linking the channels on vintage-style Marshalls. The first double triode in the preamp operates in parallel mode with each plate output routed through different voicing components before reaching individual high and low volume controls. These recombine the signals before hitting the following preamp valve so you can mix the different signals to taste.

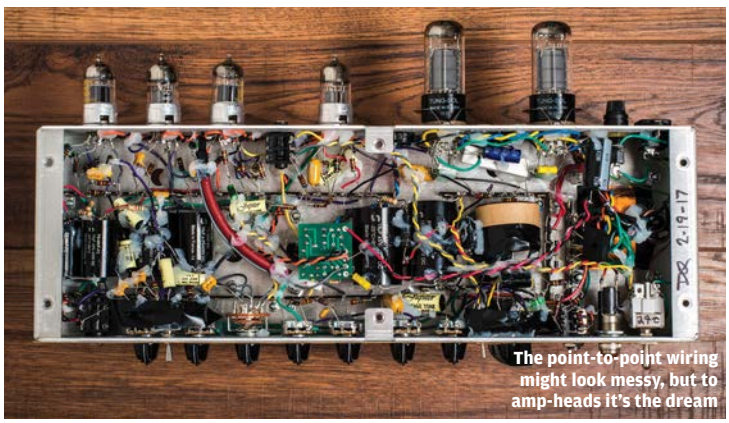
Flicking the parallel/series toggle switch reconfigures the input valve so the first triode feeds into the second triode. Both volume controls remain operative but high volume comes after the first gain stage and low volume is located after the second gain stage. So it's more of a Dumble or hot-rodded Marshall arrangement. The original Mercury's three-way tone stack defeat switch has been replaced with a three-way boost switch and a wide-range middle control augments the old treble and bass tone stack.

The built-in spring reverb is retained and designer Steve Carr suggests that it's good enough to use as an outboard effect. With traditional valve amps this can be problematic, however the Mercury V has a line output for direct to desk or soundcard duties. So Carr's suggestion is perfectly feasible and you can even silence the amp by turning the attenuator all the way down.

The G12M Creamback is a fitting choice given the British theme and it has a 75Hz resonance. There is just one speaker out, but you can run a 16-ohm extension cab in conjunction with the onboard speaker, using a 'Y' cable.

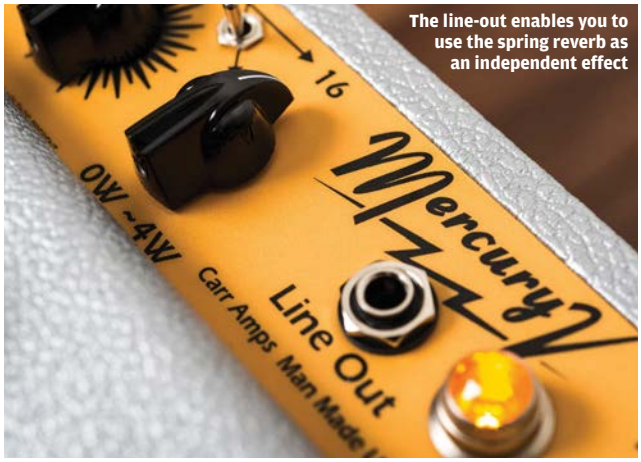
More makers claim to build amps using the point-to point wiring method than actually do so, but this is the real deal

The Mercury V is wired in Carr's usual point-to-point style. More claim to build amps using this method than actually do so, but this is the real deal. To the casual observer the components may look like a rat's nest, but it's >


The point-to-point wiring might look messy, but to amp-heads it's the dream

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £2,649
- **DESCRIPTION** One-channel fixed-bias valve combo. Built in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 16W/4W-0.002W (attenuated)
- **VALVES** 4x 12AX7, 2x 6V6
- **CONTROL PANEL** Input socket, high volume, low volume, parallel/series switch, 3-way boost, reverb, treble, mid, bass, attenuator bypass switch, attenuator control, line output, play/off/standby switch
- **REAR PANEL** N/A
- **SPEAKER** Celestion G12M Creamback (75Hz)
- **DIMENSIONS** 535(w) x 440(h) x 254mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 18kg/40lb
- **OPTIONS** 2 Tone Luna (as reviewed), Black (£2,499), also available in head-only format
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350815
  www.carramps.com
  www.coda-music.com



The line-out enables you to use the spring reverb as an independent effect

The high and low volumes can be used in series or parallel for tone-shaping variety

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Although only available in head format the **Victory Sheriff 22** (**£799**) also provides era spanning Marshall tones and comes with onboard attenuation and channel switching. Although it doesn't do the hot-rod thing, the **Gartone Regal 18** combo (**£1,950**) features independent 18W and JTM preamps and a Celestion Gold

actually a thing of beauty. Signal paths are reduced to a minimum, wherever possible components are used instead of hookup wire and silicon sealer holds everything firmly in place.

In Use

Despite the apparent complexity of the controls, the Mercury V is simple to operate once you grasp how the circuit functions. As a starting point, try setting all the tone controls to around noon, put the boost in the middle position and switch to parallel mode. With both volume controls at minimum, turn up each one individually to assess the voicings. 'Low' has considerable upper midrange and treble attenuation while 'high' has low midrange and bass roll-off.

For initial tone shaping and gain settings, balance the volume controls to zone in on your sound then tweak the tone controls to get things exactly right. Switch to series mode, start with high set at maximum with low barely on then reverse the settings. You'll notice you get more overdrive and brightness with the first configuration and a less driven but fuller tone with the second.

Again it's about balancing the two, but this time it's more about overdrive shaping than frequency balance and the tone controls play a greater role. They are extremely powerful and you can actually silence the amp by setting all three to zero.

The Mercury V is a perfect example of the supremacy of speaker selection, in conjunction with preamp and tone stack design, over power valves in determining the sonic signature of an amp. When overdriven, this amp is undeniably British sounding due to its upper-mid crunch, lower-mid punch and aggression. It's the same story clean as it generates an ethereal shimmer over scooped mids and huge lows.

There's a decent amount of clean headroom in parallel mode with boost set to minimum. It's the Mercury at its most blackface-like as the tone stack's mid-scoop is apparent. The reverb adds to the illusion and then some, going beyond splashy surf and into full-on Dick Dale territory. The differences are the Mercury V's complete lack of transient spikiness and its more throaty and compressed midrange.

Taking the boost up a notch increases gain and dramatically fills out the midrange with extra compression and low-mid growl. You can hear a sweet grittiness in the overdrive that could never be mistaken for an American accent and things really start to sing. At maximum boost you get more upper mid push and brightness along with some bass roll-off.

The boosts have exactly the same effect in series mode but the starting point for gain and midrange push is significantly higher. This isn't where you'll find its cleanest or clearest tones but if you want Dumble-tinged West Coast blues, fusion or even metal, you can dial whatever is required.

Ultimately the gain range is enormous and you can get as much sustain as you could ever need, but both preamp modes clean up from the guitar superbly. Things get cleaner rather than significantly quieter and the amp never sounds or feels lifeless – even when you're turned way down. You can also back your guitar tone fully off and the Mercury V still has sufficient harmonic overtones to retain definition.

Whether the changes constitute an improvement isn't exactly clear-cut. The original Mercury is one of our most fondly remembered amps and some of its straight-through charm has been lost. Fortunately the Mercury V also delivers incredible sustain and tactile overdrive at flatmate/family friendly levels but it's easily loud enough for gigging too. We would also suggest it has a more identifiable sonic character and is far more versatile.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Hugely versatile
+ Enormous gain and volume range
+ Powerful tone controls
+ Enjoyable line-out tone
+ Superb attenuator

– No footswitchable features
– No effects loop

A remarkably versatile and innovative amplifier with the extraordinary tone and build quality we have come to expect from Carr

9/10

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Fender Pro-Amp

Fender '57 Custom Pro-Amp

The oversized cabinet and 15-inch speaker made the Pro a cult favourite among tweed fans. Testing Fender's latest reissue in the Custom series, **HUW PRICE** discovers that size really does matter

For a while during the late 1950s, Fender had a variety of amp models that were essentially the same amplifier in different sized cabinets with various speaker configurations. If you check out the schematics of the 5E4 Super, 5E7 Bandmaster and 5E5 Pro, you'll see they are almost identical.

Where there are differences, they're confined to the output transformers and one or two components in the bias and negative feedback sections. Of the three, the Pro occupies perhaps the lowest rung on the legend ladder.

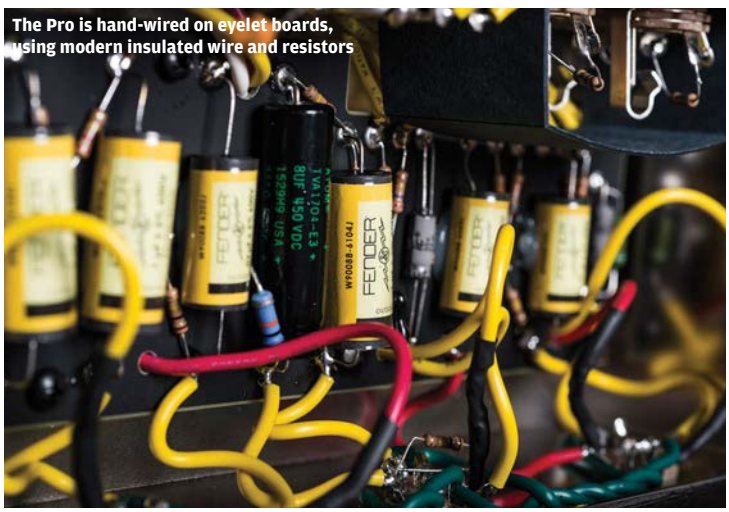
The model Fender has chosen here represents an evolution of the simpler Pros of the early 50s and the controls hint at things that were about to pass at the twilight of the tweed era. Already the tone stack had evolved to a Baxandall-type configuration and negative feedback was being used with a presence control in the loop along with fixed bias.

Fender has stayed true to vintage spec with a 12AY7 in the V1 position. Period schematics also specify a 12AY7 for V2, but this reissue has a 12AX7. Since it's a replica of a '57 model, the power valves are 6L6s rather than 5881s (used from '58 to '60) and they get their juice from a 5AR4 rectifier valve. A period-correct 5U4 rectifier can be substituted for gain and feel that's truer to vintage Pros and a 12AX7 can be used in V1 to hasten overdrive onset.

It's fair to say that Fender feels less bound to vintage specifications than some boutique builders. Although the circuit is hand-wired on traditional eyelet board, the resistors are not carbon composite and plastic insulated hookup wire is used throughout in preference to cloth covered wire. Even so, Fender is using its own-brand yellow Astron repro capacitors made from craft paper, tin foil and resin – just like the originals.

The tweed has been coated to appear aged but not relic'd. Other modern features that are commonplace on Fender's latest tweed reissues include >

The model Fender has chosen represents an evolution of the simpler Pros of the early 1950s, at the twilight of the tweed era



The Pro is hand-wired on eyelet boards, using modern insulated wire and resistors

KEY FEATURES

- **PRICE** £2,299
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel fixed bias valve combo. Built in the USA
- **POWER RATING** 26W
- **VALVES** 12AY7, 2x 12AX7, 2x 6L6, 5AR4
- **CONTROL PANEL** Mic volume, instrument volume, treble, bass, presence, standby, power, fuse holder
- **REAR PANEL** 2x speaker outs
- **SPEAKER** 15" Eminence Special Design
- **DIMENSIONS** 530(h) x 568(w) x 276mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 23.13kg/51lbs
- **CONTACT** Fender EMEA 01342 331700 **www.fender.com**

The Pro is often overlooked, but it really shouldn't be

The speaker is a 15-inch Eminence Special Design

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...
Unsurprisingly the Pro is one of the lesser copied tweed classics but for a 1 x 15" Pro replica, consider ordering up a **Frugal, Clark Penrose, Victoria 35115, Achilles**, or **Headstrong Blue Lamp 115**. Prices depend on spec so contact the builders for details

rubber switch covers that resemble prophylactics and a metal box to shield the power valves and rectifier from damage. The output transformer also switches automatically to work at four ohms when an extension speaker is connected to the second jack.

The review amp is pictured with a plastic handle but a leather handle is also supplied. A vintage-style canvas cover is provided, too. Since tweed scuffs up quite easily, owners would be well advised to use it if they want to keep this amp looking new.

A 15-inch speaker has always been the tweed Pro's distinguishing feature. Vintage examples shipped with a Jensen alnico P15N but this was often changed for a JBL. In common with Victoria's narrow-panel Pro clone the 35115, Fender has commissioned Eminence to supply a 15-inch driver for the '57 Custom.

In Use

When we reviewed Fender's The Edge Deluxe in 2016 it seemed that the 5E3's gain structure had been tweaked to deliver creamy overdrive at reasonable volumes. There's no denying it was a pretty successful outcome in that regard, but for better or worse, the amplifier isn't entirely 'vintage' in sound or function.

We can unequivocally state that the '57 Pro combines with vintage-style Strats and Telecasters to stunning effect

The sound and response of the '57 Custom Pro is much closer to the vintage tweed amps we have come to know and love, but the 15-inch speaker is the main event and it sets the Pro apart from all other tweeds. A 15-inch diameter provides a lot of speaker surface area and tested against a 12-inch Fane A60 in our Rift PR18 cabinet, the Eminence sounds both louder and brighter. The large cabinet is clearly playing a part, too, because the Pro sounds huge through its own speaker and the room-filling qualities belie its modest 26-watt power rating.

Since a tweed Pro and a Telecaster is regarded as a marriage made in heaven (aka Fullerton) that's where we started. Some claim that 15-inch speakers lack treble but the Eminence brings out all of this circuit's natural jangle, chime and cut. However, the high-end also retains sweetness even when the treble and presence controls are pushed way beyond half way.

At the other extreme the 15-inch ensures that there's no chance of a Telecaster sounding wiry or lean. The bottom end is lusciously full and rounded without being too loose and the midrange is extremely clear and articulate. We also noticed that there was no transient spikiness, so pedal-steel licks on the back pickup need no compressor enhancement.

Even before the amp volume reaches halfway, a deliciously Stonsey overdrive and grind makes its presence felt. Bass string riffs punch through while treble strings ring over the top. Push the Pro just over halfway and the bass response softens as typical tweed fierceness creeps into the upper mids.

Above this it's all ferocious overdrive, awesome sustain and harmonic bloom. Additionally the midrange thickens at higher volume with just a hint of cocked wah throatiness. You will also notice that the microphone inputs yield a slightly beefier and fuller tone than the instrument inputs.

While we can unequivocally state that the Pro combines with Teles and Strats to stunning effect, changing over to a Les Paul reveals why some are less enamoured of 15-inch speakers. Even with brightly voiced Monty's PAFs, the Pro's bass end starts to struggle.

To be fair it's mostly noticeable at high volume with the neck pickup selected, but things get a bit ragged and loose with the 15, while holding together just fine through a 12-inch. For rougher blues styles this quality may be regarded as an authentic asset, but for general playing with a variety of guitars, the Pro might not be the best all-rounder if you only plan to own one tweed. However if you play a single-coil guitar in a three-piece band, it does fill out the sound in a way that smaller tweed amps, such as a Deluxe, never could.

The qualities that enhance one type of guitar may not suit another, but it's the nature of the beast and shouldn't be taken as a criticism of the Pro or its Eminence speaker. Far from it because by daring to stay (mostly) true to vintage specs, the result is almost certainly the most intriguing, exciting and best sounding of all the Fender tweed reissues we have tried so far.

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Full and fat tweed tones
+ Equally adept clean or dirty
+ Big room-filling tone
+ Extremely dynamic

–Loose lows with bass-heavy guitars
–Interacts best with single coils

Though the 15-inch speaker won't suit every guitar or guitarist, with the right guitar this is a stunning sounding amp

9/10

MINI MONSTERS

PEAVEY

CLASSIC 20MH
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6505MH
A metal masterpiece, the 6505MH features an all tube preamp and power amp to authentically produces the huge tones of its legendary big brother.

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Blackstar LT-Echo 10 & Fly 3 Bluetooth

Now, are these amplifiers small... or very far away? **CHRIS VINNICOMBE** wonders if practice amps really can be made perfect...

Blackstar's rise since its formation a decade ago has been remarkable to behold. Now one of the world's biggest amp brands, just as there's a Stratocaster at every price point, you can buy into the Blackstar sound whether you're a beginner or a pro. And happily there's more chance of encountering a turkey at Paul McCartney's house at Christmas than there is of buying one with a Blackstar logo on it.

2014's Fly 3 was a case in point: a battery-powered, three-watt micro-amp that doesn't sound like a wasp playing a kazoo and with musical on board tape-style delay? Surely not. Fast-forward to 2017 and the new Fly 3 Bluetooth retains all the functionality of the original but also allows you to stream music to it wirelessly. This means you can use the unit as a portable speaker for music playback or jamming along, without your music-playing device being physically tethered to it.

Alongside the Fly 3 we have another compact, new amp: the LT-Echo 10. A mains-powered product, this pushes 10-watts through a pair of three-inch drivers and also features two channels, a tape delay-style effect and the company's now familiar ISF tone-shaping EQ control. There's not much around the back other than space to stow the mains cable and a handy Velcro cable tidy.

In Use

In the history of the electric guitar, 'student' amps have had a slightly odd trajectory. The five-watt wonders of the 1950s still sound glorious today and yet by the 1990s, most amplifiers aimed at beginners were dispiriting affairs short on both tone and fun. Today the choice is somewhat better, to say the least.

If you haven't plugged into a Fly 3 for a while, it's still surprising how grown up it sounds for its size. Alongside decent cleans and drive sounds, with the gain and volume controls riding high and the OD switch disengaged there's some raunchy crunch available that's good for 60s power-pop, Stones-y R&B and many other classic styles. Throw in a little slapback from the onboard delay and it's pretty infectious stuff.

Audio streaming is trouble-free – use your mobile device's volume control to set the level of the backing track for practice sessions. If you are simply listening to music there's a level of depth and detail that compares favourably to more costly mono DAB radios and dedicated Bluetooth speakers. For home office or kitchen use, or for background sounds at a party, the Fly 3 is up to the task.

As expected, the LT-Echo 10's additional speaker, chunkier cabinet and extra wattage translate into a bigger voice. There are no individual controls for gain and volume – see the LT-Echo 15 (£84.99) for that – so it's a binary choice between preset amounts of clean or dirty. Clean tones are rather basic – the delay does liven things up but you only get control over delay time, whereas the Fly has delay level too. The star of the show is the OD channel, with a heavy alt-rock drive tone that's much more credible than we'd expect from a 60 quid practice amp.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

The LT-Echo 10 pitches against **Laney**'s **LX10 £55**, which has clean and dirty sounds, two-band EQ, aux in and a headphone out but no onboard effects and five watts of power. Portable amps with Bluetooth are rare but **Yamaha**'s **THR5 £170** ticks every other 'lifestyle' amp box.

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar LT-Echo 10

- **PRICE** £59.99
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel, mains-powered analogue guitar amplifier with delay. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 10W
- **CONTROL PANEL** Instrument input, volume, OD channel on/off, ISF, delay on/off, delay time, mp3/line in mini jack, speaker emulated/headphone out
- **SPEAKER** 2x 3"
- **DIMENSIONS** 216(w) x 252(h) x 142mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 3kg/6.6lbs
- **CONTACT** Blackstar 01604 817817 **www.blackstaramps.com**

Guitar VERDICT

+ Impressive drive sound for an amp of this size
+ Onboard delay livens up the clean tones

- Lacks mid-gain sounds
- Wired audio playback only

A capable first amp for fledgling rockers that more experienced fans of heavy music will enjoy, too

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Blackstar Fly 3 Bluetooth

- **PRICE** £79.99
- **DESCRIPTION** 2-channel analogue guitar amplifier with Bluetooth and delay. Powered by 6x AA batteries or PSU-1 mains adaptor. Made in China
- **POWER RATING** 3W
- **CONTROL PANEL** Instrument input, Bluetooth, gain, OD channel on/off, volume, ISF, delay level, delay time, mp3/line in mini jack, speaker emulated/headphone out
- **SPEAKER** 1x 3" (for stereo operation the Fly 103 extension cabinet is £19.99)
- **DIMENSIONS** 170 (w) x 126 (h) x 102mm (d)
- **WEIGHT** 0.9kg/1.9lbs

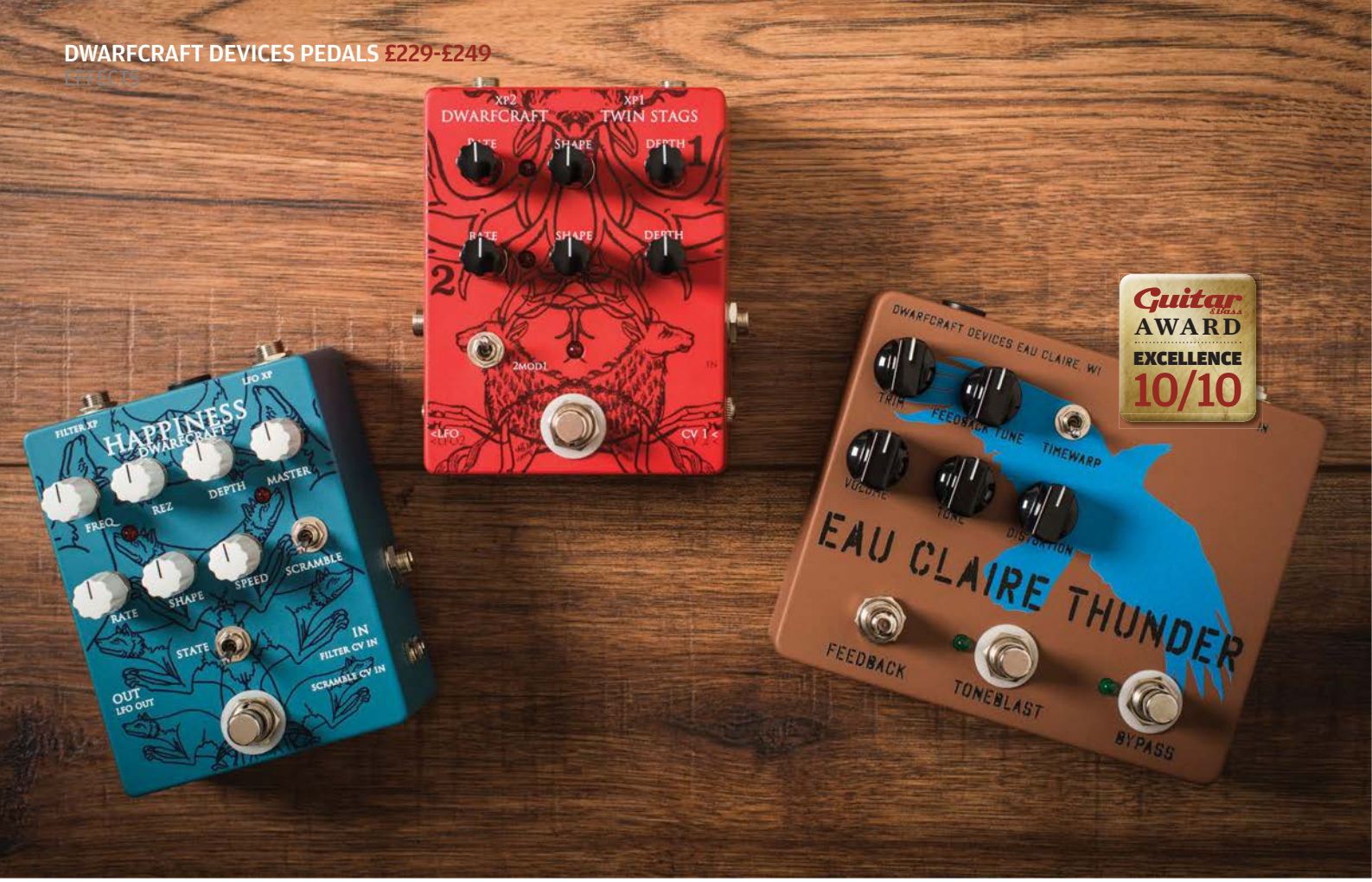
Guitar VERDICT

+ Surprisingly good, versatile sounds from a tiny box
+ Bluetooth expands its potential as a practice and listening device

- The inevitable price jump from the non-Bluetooth model

The best battery-powered micro-amp in the business just got even more useful

9/10



Dwarfcraft Devices Happiness, Twin Stags & Eau Claire Thunder

Scrambled filters, LFO outputs and a 'toneblast' switch: **RICHARD PURVIS** goes on a sonic adventure with some American originals

Dwarfcraft might sound like the world's geekiest online role-playing game, but the only wizardry at work here is electronic. Dwarfcraft Devices is a genuine boutique operation and all the pedals are built in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, along with some synth modules... which might be a clue to understanding the firm's approach to stompboxes. There's a lot of analogue filtering, and many of Dwarfcraft's products are designed to play as nicely with keyboards and synths as they do with guitars and basses.

Here we have the Happiness multi-mode filter and Twin Stags dual tremolo – both of which feature synth-compatible CV inputs and LFO outputs – plus the Eau Claire Thunder, a fuzz box with options labelled 'toneblast', 'timewarp' and 'feedback tune'. If that's not intriguing, we don't know what is.

Happiness

Look away now, blues-rock purists. The Happiness is inspired by the filter found in the Steiner-Parker Synthacon of the late 70s and recently revived by the Arturia MiniBrute. So it's all about pulsating synth-like effects, with a triangle-shaped low-frequency oscillator (LFO) providing the heartbeat. It's fully analogue.

Dwarfcraft is a genuine boutique operation. The pedals and synth modules are built in Eau Claire, Wisconsin

The most important controls are those on the left-hand side: these are responsible for regulating the filter's cut-off frequency and resonance, and the rate and angle of the LFO. Then there's a three-way toggle switch for setting the filter to high-pass, band-pass or low-pass, and a speed control for the scramble mode that's engaged by the switch on the right. This throws a stepped 'sample and hold' factor into the oscillation.

Two expression pedal inputs mean that you can use your feet to change the rate and/or cutoff frequency, and the two mini-jack sockets on the right side allow you to synchronise both standard and scramble rates to any device with a control voltage (CV) output. This could be handy if, say, you want the

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Happiness

The **Earthquaker Devices Interstellar Orbiter £179** uses two filters for seriously extreme modulation effects, but if you want to go all-out synth you might prefer the **Red Witch Synthotron £249** – or you could even ditch that silly old guitar and get an **Arturia MicroBrute £242**!

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Twin Stags

For dual analogue tremolos with ultimate digital control, you need the **Stone Deaf FX Tremotron £208**. A couple of options for switching between two trems, rather than having both at once, are the JRAD **Josh Smith Dual Tremolo £199** and **JHS Pedals Honeycomb Deluxe £209**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Eau Claire Thunder

There's a UK-built option for fans of the green Sovtek Big Muff, and it's the **Fredric Effects Green Russian £95**. The much-acclaimed **Thorpy FX Fallout Cloud £185** is another Muff-inspired beast, but for a simple multi-voiced fuzz you'll be hard-pushed to beat the **Walrus Audio Jupiter £151**

Happiness to pulsate in time with a drum sequencer.

In Use

Well, this thing is barmy. We did plan to start off with a simple autowah or phaser setting and take it from there, but looking for conventional sounds in here is like looking for financial advisers at a bog-snorkelling festival. If the Happiness has a characteristic sound it's a sort of sci-fi 'pew-pew-pew' effect, but tweak a couple of knobs and it could become 'wup-wup-wup'. The shape control lets you manipulate the attack/decay angle of the LFO – hard impact to the right, soft ramping to the left – but it's very interactive with the depth knob, and much depends on whether you've set the switch to cut out the top end of the signal, the bottom end, or both.

There's a warning in the manual to lower the output level before pushing the resonance control past halfway, which is where is starts to self-oscillate – it's sage advice, because there are high-pitched squeals and chirrups involved and they get super-loud quite suddenly. The effect is even more sci-fi now, especially when you glitch it up with the scramble switch. We could play around with this for hours without even having a guitar plugged in.

Twin Stags

Okay, we all know what tremolo is (well, apart from a certain legendary guitar and amp designer who kept getting it mixed up with vibrato). The Twin Stags puts two of them in one box, each using a VCA-powered by a triangular LFO, and includes the option of using the second effect's oscillator to modulate the speed of the first one.

As with the Happiness, 'shape' changes the lean angle of the LFO's triangle, and the two-directional depth controls are at minimum when centred. Each tremolo has its own expression pedal input plus CV in and LFO out, and we'll be getting the Happiness back out of its box to help test these out.

In Use

Well, there are no surprises in the basic sound of the first trem on its own – it's as warm and throbby as you like, and as percussive or as strangely 'reversed' as you like, with plenty of more subtle options in between. Bring in the other circuit at a different rate and the two begin to trip over each other in quirkily arrhythmic ways – it's quite beguiling, though you may struggle to find the same pattern twice.

Engaging the '2mod1' switch allows you to run one trem at a rhythmic subdivision of the other, and this might ultimately prove to be a more useful effect; it has to be said, though, that it offers nothing like the same degree of control as the Stone Deaf FX Tremotron we reviewed back in our May issue. What you do get instead is synchronisation with other devices via CV – this works perfectly in both directions, and requires no more effort than plugging in a standard mini-jack cable.

Eau Claire Thunder

Dwarfcraft chiefs Ben and Louise Hinz decided to name this high-gain fuzz after their hometown's bad weather, which is a novel way of expressing civic pride. It's based on the green, Russian-made version of the EHX Big Muff from the 1990s – a fine pedal, with a big old bottom end and more midrange grind than the average American Muff.

You'll notice that this unit has more than three controls, though. They've added a host of extra features: a trim control to preserve headroom with hotter pickups, a timewarp switch for vintage or modern voicing, a 'toneblast' footswitch that bypasses the whole EQ section, and a non-latching footswitch that engages an internal feedback loop.

In Use

We're not going to mince our words here. The Eau Claire Thunder sounds absolutely, undeniably fantastic. It slaps down huge helpings of rich, deep, gurgling fuzz, with the emphasis on the low end – but not at the expense of silky treble when you want it. The voicing switch flips you instantly between pure grunge power and stoner-rock sludge, while toneblast gives everything a powerful lift that's felt most acutely in the mids.

Internal feedback is the booze-soaked cherry on the top of this already delicious fuzz cake. Hold down the left footswitch and it slips into a sustained note that you can bend up and down with the tuning knob – it gets properly grainy in the low notes, and even does a passable 'accelerating F1 car' effect. And, as with the self-oscillating Happiness, you don't even need a guitar plugged in to have bags of fun.

Guitar & Bass AWARD EXCELLENCE 10/10

KEY FEATURES

Dwarfcraft Happiness

- **PRICE** £249
- **DESCRIPTION** Multi-mode analogue filter pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Frequency, resonance, depth, master volume, rate, shape, 'scramble' speed and on/off switch; high/band/low-pass toggle switch
- **FEATURES** Exp inputs for LFO rate & filter cut-off, CV inputs for filter & scramble speed, LFO out; true bypass, 9V batt or 150mA+ PSU (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 123x106x78mm
- **CONTACT** Coda Music 01438 350 815 **coda-music.com dwarfcraft.com**

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Lovely glitchy bleepy soundscapes in spades
+ Could also be useful as a distinctive autowah alternative
+ Easily synced with other CV-equipped hardware

- Not as controllable as a good keyboard-based analogue synth

A clever little box of filtery delights for knob-twiddling pioneers

8/10

KEY FEATURES

Dwarfcraft Twin Stags

- **PRICE** £229
- **DESCRIPTION** Dual tremolo pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Trem 1 rate, shape, depth; trem 2 rate, shape, depth; '2 modulates 1' toggle switch
- **FEATURES** Expression pedal inputs for Trem 1 and 2 rate, CV inputs and LFO outputs; true bypass, 9V battery or 150mA+ mains power (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 123x106x78mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Sounds great as a simple tremolo with tweakable shape
+ Two effects together can produce cool arrhythmic patterns

- No bypass switching for the individual trems
- Not half as exciting or versatile as the Happiness

A nice unit that just lacks the wow factor of the other two on test

7/10

KEY FEATURES

Dwarfcraft Eau Claire Thunder

- **PRICE** £249
- **DESCRIPTION** Fuzz pedal, made in USA
- **CONTROLS** Input trim, output volume, tone, distortion; 'timewarp' voicing toggle switch, 'toneblast' EQ bypass footswitch, momentary internal feedback footswitch with 'tune' control
- **FEATURES** True bypass, 9V battery or 150mA+ mains power (not supplied)
- **DIMENSIONS** 145x122x58mm

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Thunderous fuzz with a gorgeously grainy texture
+ Tone bypass footswitch offers a useful boost
+ Internal feedback adds a psychedelic option

- We're struggling to think of a negative for this one!

A big-hearted fuzz with a luscious core tone and some nifty extra tricks

10/10

UAD Fender '55 Tweed Deluxe

Authentic tweed amp tone for the 21st century from one of the plugin industry's most respected brands? **HUW PRICE** flexes his digits...

KEY FEATURES

UAD Fender 55 Tweed Deluxe

- **PRICE** £149 (plugin only)
- **DESCRIPTION** Digital plugin simulation of a 1955 Fender 5E3 amplifier with 3 speaker models, 5 microphone models with individual level controls, bass roll off, on/off axis, panning and master output level
- **CONTACT** www.uaudio.com

UAD is the DSP platform of music tech giant Universal Audio, and the US company is courting tech-savvy amp aficionados with this digital plugin emulation of a 1955 Fender 5E3 Deluxe. You can record through it, or process guitar signals that have been pre-recorded through a DI box, while listening back through monitor speakers. As such it's designed to sound and respond like a tweed Deluxe that's mic'd up in a studio live room rather than an amplifier that's actually in the room with you.

We tested the plugin using a UAD Apollo Quad interface as well as an Apollo Duo with a Mac Mini and a system running a UAD 2 Satellite with a MacBook Pro. The DAWs were GarageBand and Logic.

In Use

This plugin eats up 34 per cent of the available DSP when running a single UAD 2 Satellite. With UAD Apollo interfaces the DSP allocation was eight per cent and five per cent for the Duo and Quad cores respectively. For users with older and more modest Universal Audio setups, this might preclude the plugin from being used as a mixing tool. Processed guitar sounds will need to be bounced in order to free up your processing power for compressors, reverbs and so forth.

No wonder this plugin is DSP-hungry because it's extremely sophisticated. However, it's also very intuitive and you don't have to be an engineer to use it.

The GUI features a Deluxe-style control panel with four inputs that can be selected individually or cross patched. A normal/line switch sets the input level depending on whether you're feeding the plug in with a line level pre-recorded signal or the lower level guitar signal via a UAD audio interface. There's also a three-way speaker switch offering emulations of an original Jensen P12R, a JBL-D12F or a Celestion greenback.

This reviewer recently recorded a band using a Celestion Blue-loaded '59 Deluxe with a Royer 121 ribbon mic, while simultaneously taking a clean signal straight off the guitar using a DI box. So we start out trying to replicate the recorded Deluxe by processing the DI signal with the UA plugin.

It's a shame that UA went with a Celestion Greenback model rather than the more well-regarded Blue, but even so we're able to match the original sound fairly closely using the plugin – albeit with the JBL speaker model selected. The original was mic'd at around 20cm and the UA simulations sound like they were closer mic'd to eliminate room ambience. On balance, it's a wise option because it's easy to add ambience, but hard to remove it.

When playing guitar through the plugin, try scrolling through the presets to get a sense of what it can do, then experiment with mics and on/off axis placement. We're impressed with the tweed-like clean-up and it even does spluttering Neil Young fuzzy freakout. There is some grit in the overdrive, but it's much like the real thing.

We would have no compunction about using this plug in lieu of a regular tweed amp. The range of tones is incredible, the response is very amp-like and it sounds like a properly mic'd tweed Deluxe. It's also way beyond what you can achieve from a regular guitar modeller. If you're a novice recordist with limited access to quality microphones, preamps and recording spaces, it's a virtual guarantee of pro-quality tweed-style tone.

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE

Apple's GarageBand and Logic both feature tweed amp simulations that are bundled with the package. **IK Multimedia Amplitube 4 £149** is a plugin software suite containing nine amps and 10 speaker models. Official Fender models are included and more can be purchased via the Custom Shop

Guitar & Bass VERDICT

+ Cutting edge modelling with amp-like dynamic response
+ Wide range of clean and driven tones with impressive clean-up

- DSP hungry
- No distance control for mics
- Slightly raspy with high gain
- Latency-free input monitoring requires UA hardware buy-in

For tweed tones in a studio environment it's a lot of fun, but the higher gain settings can get a little harsh – it's better for processing than as a front end

8/10

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Vintage TIME MACHINES

1939 GIBSON SUPER 400

A work of art from the jazz age, this premium priced archtop is a high-water mark of Gibson's craft

This is not just another beautiful vintage guitar. The instrument you're looking at set a benchmark for high-end archtops that luthiers have chased for generations since.

Like many other pre-war Gibson models, the Super 400 was named for its original price tag: a whopping $400. In today's money, that would be an eye-watering $7,113! Let that price tag sink in for a minute. This guitar was most certainly not for everyone. The marketers may simply have seen it as their spare-no-expense flagship model, but it became a lasting work of art.

The Super 400 was the most visually detailed and ornamented guitar of its era. It is also an incredible sounding instrument, with tight, articulate and cutting projection that almost sounds amplified without any pickup. Even though it was the largest guitar built at the time – and still one of the largest today – it didn't have the bass-biased boom of a dreadnought or jumbo. Notes in the lower register are punchy and well-defined.

It was this blend of striking beauty and tone that inspired luthiers like John D'Angelico and Charles Stromberg to create their own interpretations of the archtop that would eventually eclipse the Super 400.

This set the benchmark for high-end archtops that luthiers have chased for generations since

This particular 1939 specimen is incredibly clean, still sporting the hand-engraved tailpiece that would change later in the production year. The name 'Super 400' is also hand-etched into the heel of the neck. The highly flamed maple back and sides were not standard on every model, increasing this specimen's value about 30 per cent over those sporting plain maple.

The Gibson Super 400 was originally introduced in early 1935 as the Super L-5 Deluxe, but the name changed before the end of the year. Production would last until 1941, with tailpiece and upper bout changes made in late 1939. After the war, production resumed from 1947 to 1955. There were several different iterations of the Super 400 during the 1940s and 50s, including a natural finish option, cutaway models, and the addition of a pickup.

This one, then, lands right at the tail end of the original spec production run, and it's in all-original condition. That makes it a living testament to the skill and ambition of the builders who carved its top, shaped its braces and etched its name by hand. They would want to see this in the hands of a player, not in a museum. To the eventual buyer, we're rooting for you.

VITAL STATISTICS

1939 Gibson Super 400

- **PRICE GUIDE** £6,700-£8,700
- **YEAR** 1939
- **TYPE** Hollowbody Archtop
- **REVERB SELLER** GuitarPoint reverb.com/shop/guitarpoint
- **SEE MORE** reverb.com/item/1414903-gibson-super-400-1939-sunburst

GRETSCH
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PX 6124
Anniversary
Model

Vintage BENCH TEST

HAPPY ANNIVERSARY

Regular readers will have seen **HUW PRICE** strip down a derelict Gretsch Anniversary and convert it into his dream 6120, but here he gets to spend some quality time with an example that's in infinitely better condition...

Regular readers of *G&B* will no doubt be aware of my recent Gretsch Anniversary restoration and conversion project, and I'm pretty excited about trying out this guitar. Besides having a sunburst rather than two-tone green finish, this is exactly as my guitar would have left Gretsch's Brooklyn factory in 1960.

Although the serial number remains clearly legible on the internal label, Gretsch must have used a different stamp for the model number because it has almost completely faded away. It would have read '6124' to designate the single pickup and sunburst finish. Green single Anniversaries are '6125' models.

Although the first double (two-pickup) and single (one-pickup) Anniversary models had 6120-style trestle bracing, Filter'Tron pickups and unbound ebony fingerboards, this example missed out by a matter of months – if not weeks. The 'board is Brazilian rosewood but the trestle bracing has gone, so this is a true hollowbody archtop.

The Hilo'Tron pickup still strongly divides opinion among Gretsch fanatics today

By the dawn of the 1960s, the penny had finally dropped that it made no commercial sense for Gretsch to equip its entry level and flagship models with the same pickups. So it's bye-bye Filter'Tron and hello to the Hilo'Tron – a notoriously low-output single coil that still strongly divides opinion among Gretsch fanatics today.

Thus far our Vintage Bench Test features have mostly included clean and highly original guitars >

Above **The screen printed 'G' logo on vintage Hilo'Tron single-coil pickups has often been partially rubbed away by years of playing wear**

Above **Some attractive flame figure can be seen on the guitar's maple laminate sides**
Opposite page, top **The Space Control bridge allowed owners to set their preferred string spacing but they are notoriously noisy in use**
Bottom **Gretsch sometimes used domed crosshead screws on pickup rings during this era**

or beaten up road warriors. Condition-wise this is in a category of its own because playing wear is minimal and it has never been modified, but its originality extends to the filth and detritus that looks to have been building up from the get go.

Some like their vintage guitars this way, but I'm in no doubt that a pleasant afternoon spent with a bottle of specialist guitar cleaning fluid, a pile of old rags and some polish would restore this Anniversary to near-pristine condition. Besides a few inconsequential treble side divots across the first five frets, the fingerboard is in great shape and only one of the thumbnail markers shows any sign of damage.

An afternoon spent cleaning would restore this Anniversary to near-pristine condition

In addition to the fingerboard, other areas on the guitar show evidence of play wear. Small patches of finish have rubbed through behind the third fret and the in the open E thumb rollover area. There is some minor arm wear on the lower bout, and where the dark outer-edge of the burst has worn through, it can be seen that Gretsch used a black inner layer of binding despite only scraping back the finish to reveal the cream outer layer.

Gretsches of this era are notorious for suffering from binding rot – where cracks and crazing begins to appear in the cream binding as it ages. In some cases the rot can be so severe that the binding simply disintegrates, and with lower end models such as single Anniversaries the cost of replacement can exceed the value of the guitar. This example has a tiny bit of rot in the cutaway, but it appears stable and shouldn't give much cause for concern. There are a couple of cracks in the binding, too, but these were most likely caused by shrinkage and it's something that can affect any vintage guitar regardless of brand.

There appears to be no typical ageing pattern to vintage Gretsches and it's common to see well used examples with no lacquer checking whatsoever. This Anniversary is an exception, with ultra fine lacquer checking all over the body and neck that merely serves to enhance its vintage character. >

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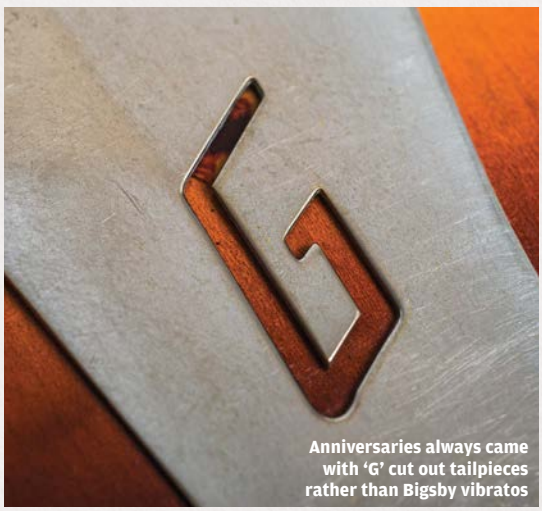
Play wear has exposed a thin line of wood adjacent to the binding on the lower bout and there's also some light checking



Anniversaries always came with 'G' cut out tailpieces rather than Bigsby vibratos

Old Gretsch knobs lack the heavy knurl often seen on modern reproductions

Vintage Gretsches are notorious for binding rot, but here it's confined to a small area inside the cutaway

Play wear shows how a previous owner liked to thumb wrap in the first position and this thumbnail marker has seen better days

KEY FEATURES

1960 Gretsch Anniversary

- **PRICE** £1,600
- **DESCRIPTION** Hollowbody archtop electric guitar, made in the USA
- **BUILD** Laminated maple body, set maple neck with walut centre strip, Brazilian rosewood fingerboard, thumbnail markers, 21 frets
- **HARDWARE** Waverly open-gear tuners
- **ELECTRICS** Original Hilo'Tron single-coil pickup, volume, 3-way treble cut switch (centre bypassed)
- **FINISH** 3-tone sunburst nitrocellulose
- **SCALE LENGTH** 625.5mm/24.6"
- **NECK WIDTH** 43mm at nut/52mm at 12th fret
- **DEPTH OF NECK** 20mm at first fret, 23mm at 9th fret
- **STRING SPACING** 35mm at nut, 51.5mm at bridge
- **WEIGHT** 2.6kg/5.8lbs
- **CONTACT** Cranes Music 01792 654840 **www.cranes.co.uk**

With just the one pickup, the control layout on this Anniversary is about as simple as it gets, with just one lightly knurled volume knob. If you're wondering what the toggle is for with just a single pickup, it's Gretsch's notorious three-way 'mud switch'. Rather than install a conventional tone control, as it had up until the changeover from DeArmond to Filter'Tron pickups, Gretsch used a switch that offered two pre-set bass roll-offs.

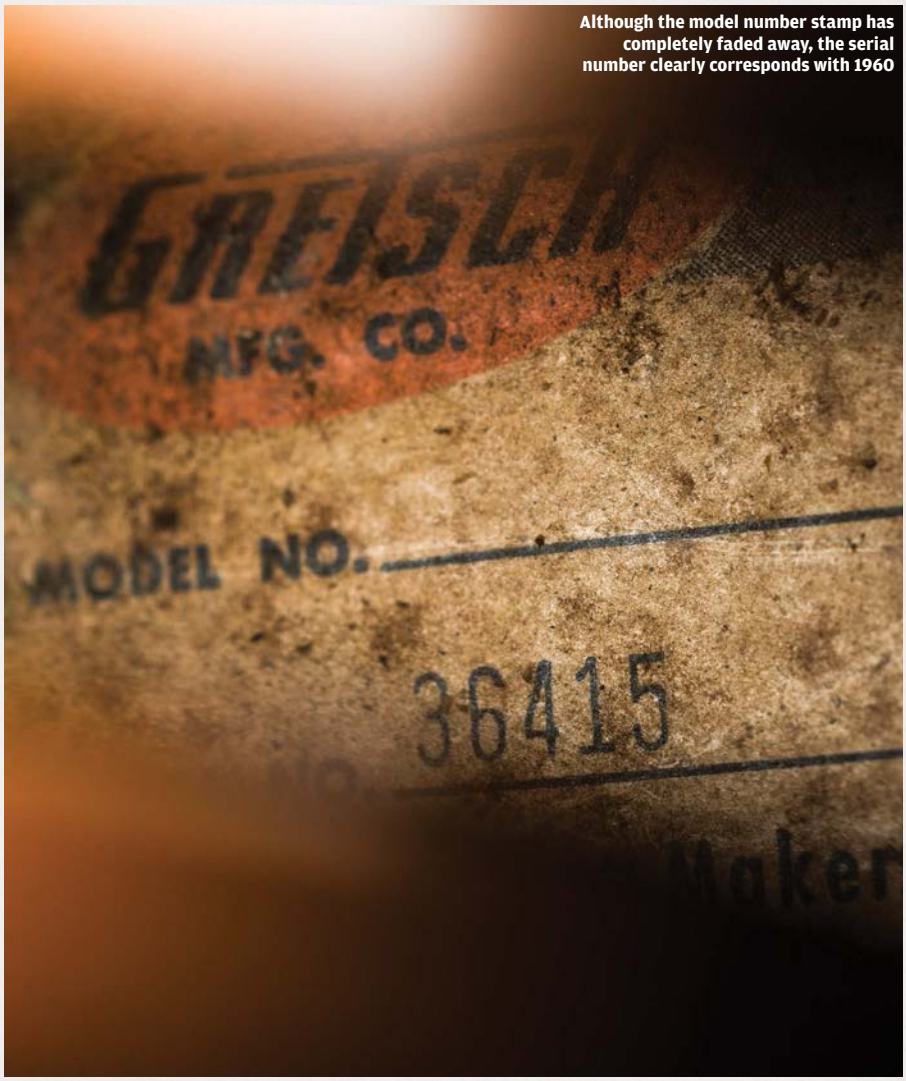
When implemented properly, as it is on modern Gretsch guitars, the mud switch can actually be a very usable feature. But in typical old-school Gretsch fashion, a shot was fired into the corporate foot by selecting two capacitor values (0.1mf and 0.047mf) that both rolled off so much treble the guitars lost all definition when the switch was engaged. This essentially means that it's like having the tone control rolled fully back with no in-between settings. Fortunately it's easy to retrofit more suitable capacitor values – modern Gretsch spec is 0.012uF and 0.0039uF.

Rather than a conventional tone control, Gretsch used a switch that offered two pre-set bass roll-offs

Besides the missing pickguard, this guitar is in all-original and unmolested condition. The only parts that make me suspicious are the domed pickup surround screws, but since the surround itself doesn't have the familiar countersinks, they're most likely factory fitted. The guitar also comes with a vintage hang tag and cable in a Gretsch case that may or may not be original to the guitar. The colour appears correct but there's no 'Gretsch' name tag.

In Use

The guitar is fitted with a set of electric strings that included a wound G, and on balance they suit this guitar very well for acoustic and jazzy electric playing. The heavy-ish gauge works nicely with the 24 5/8" scale length and helps to drive the top. Without a Bigsby to add weight and dampen things, it's a full and rich acoustic tone that sounds evenly balanced and has surprising sustain. Those in the know sometimes claim the single Anniversaries have superior acoustic tone to the doubles and are better jazz guitars.



Although the model number stamp has completely faded away, the serial number clearly corresponds with 1960

Hilos may divide opinion, but judged on their own merits they have an undeniable charm and the pickup does a decent job of capturing this guitar's acoustic tone and adding a sweet and twangy brightness on top. It's actually quite sensitive to playing touch and brings out subtle details. I've found that they can sound even better when they're shimmed up to get the coils closer to the strings and this one certainly has headroom available.

Although this guitar's mud switch is typically woolly, the down position does retain some definition. If you want just a smidge of treble roll off, try rolling back the volume control a hair. The treble softens with relatively little drop in volume. Although the pickup struggles to overdrive an amp unassisted, it's a delight for clean chord melody and Travis picking styles. Add a bit of reverb or slapback and some tremolo and it's a heart-tuggingly evocative tone that's articulate, woody and pure.

This guitar still has its original nut and frets yet it plays flawlessly with a low action. The neck joint is stable and perfect with an excellent back angle and although the bridge is set about as low as it can go, there are no structural issues. With a clean up and fresh strings this guitar would be about as good as vintage single Anniversaries get and at a price that's significantly lower than a double Annie reissue.

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KINGSMAN STRUMS

In nearly four decades of collecting, Richard Kingsman has amassed an enviable selection of classic guitars and one-off curiosities. Join us as we take a closer look...

Story & photography **Lars Mullen**

Richard Kingsman started collecting guitars in the 80s while touring as a professional guitarist. Having owned several guitar shops since then, he was in many ways the original kid in a sweet shop.

"After being in bands for as far back as I can remember and owning guitar shops for 25 years, I've lost count of how many guitars have passed through my hands", says Richard. "I own The Music Trading Company in Rye, Sussex which can be a huge strain on my wallet, especially when a favourite that I may not have or a cleaner model comes in for part exchange. Although, there are signs that I'm slowly getting over the habit!" he laughs. "I also had the collecting bug in the 1980s. It was call the boom-years for amassing guitars, because you could afford to buy old guitars before it all went silly.

When it came to picking up vintage axes, Richard had a key advantage over other bargain hunters...

"I'd look through the weekly music papers like the Melody Maker, which came out every Thursday, for the best private deals," he explains. "But I knew a local newsagent in Soho who received delivery late on Wednesday, so I was one step ahead. I'd often go to see one guitar and leave with two amps and six guitars."

"I'd often go to see one guitar and leave with two amps and six guitars"

It was an addiction that eventually grew into something much more substantial, however...

"I was always looking to the future and after years of trading, I just decided to open my own shop," Richard explains. "The first was in Ealing Broadway. Looking back now, I think we were a little bored and just collected as many guitars as we could hoping they'd be worth a fortune one day. Luckily, I focused on what have now become the classics, many >

Opposite page **Richard Kingsman, with two of his most treasured guitars – his Veleno, and his one-off '8-Guitar', made by Chris Eccleshall**
Above (l-r) **1930s Bakelite Premiervox, 1950s Maccaferri G-40, Silvertone L562 Colorama, Fenton-Weill Dualmaster**

Top left (l-r) **2012 Gibson Skunk Baxter Firebird, 2002 Firebird VII, 2015 Firevbird VII, 1976 Firebird Bicenntenial & 1967 Firebird III**
Right **1960s Gibson SG Juniors**
Bottom left (l-r) **Gibson Explorer, Gibson V2 Natural, 1970 Gibson Flying V, Gibson Moderne**

of which I used in my band, Straight 8UK, in the 80s. We played a lot of high profile gigs and toured Europe with Queen in 1980."

Richard's guitar of choice in this period was a hard rock icon – one that saw its share of battle scars over the years. "My main guitar for that period was a black Gibson Flying V from 1970, Richard confirms. "I had the Vibrola fitted by Peter Cook, removed the tone control circuit and fitted a mirror scratchplate. It had a headstock repair after it fell off a stand whilst recording our first album, I saw it topple and couldn't do anything about it. When a Gibson falls over, it's usually the headstock that suffers. Luckily the record label paid for the repair."

As well as the classics, Richard's V-love takes in some truly unique birds along the way. "I also have a Natural V2 with Boomerang pickups and a Gibson Moderne, which is number two of four prototypes built in 1980," he enthuses. "I'm more of a rock player so I naturally lean toward a Flying V, Firebirds are also high on my list, but I've only upped the numbers to five in the last few years.

"I have one Non Reverse Firebird at the moment from '67 with three of the best sounding P-90s I've heard, I'm told they used old stock P-90s from the 50s, maybe that's why. My favourite is my '02 Firebird VII with a copper finish, followed by a Skunk Baxter signature model from 2012, also in copper, which has on-off and phase controls for the Classic '57 mini-humbuckers. Then there's a blue mist Firebird VII from 2015 with a trio of full-size humbuckers – these new generation models certainly balance better on the shoulder unlike the early ones like my black Bicentennial model from '76. I adore black guitars."

Indeed, as we go through his collection, Richard's love of black is clearly in evidence. "Here are two more in black," he says, pulling out two Les Pauls. "A Custom with amber binding and my '94 Classic, which is my favourite of all my guitars – I've been gigging this for over 10 years. Apart from being black, it has all the attributes that I want in a guitar, like Kluson tuners, a distinct carved top, nickel hardware and hot ceramic pickups. I'm lucky to have a great choice of pickups here, especially the early ones like the P-90s on my SG Juniors from the early 60s. I have one refinished in white and a pair in Cherry red, one of which needed a lot of

restoration work by Clive Brown and has turned out the best of the three."

As is the way with buying vintage curios, the dreaded 'R' word is a frequent companion – but it's not something that phases Richard.

"Several of my guitars have required restoration work, or a project I've left half finished. My '66 Tele is a fine example. It came in to one of my shops in Acton around 1999. It was covered in carved leather with rope binding. As I'm a vegan I had to get the leather off, but the adhesive had melted into the nitro and destroyed the original sunburst finish. I was going to go for a respray, but stood back and thought it had such an aged look about it, unlike the back, which is immaculate. It had been played so hard by the same guy for over 25 years, that he'd scalloped deep divots under the 2nd and 3rd strings, which I carefully filled and levelled off so it was at least playable.

"I have several T-types here including a black Schecter that Pete Townshend used in the early 80s and a Fender I used throughout that decade, in black of course, with a mirror scratchplate."

With so much knowledge and experience under his belt, it's no surprise that Richard has formed his own opinions on guitars through the decades.

"The transition Strats from '65, when Fender sold out to CBS, seemed to have that extra sparkle"

"I've come to the conclusion after handling so many early Strats, that the transition models from '65, when Fender sold out to CBS, seemed to have that extra sparkle," he insists. "The one in Lake Placid Blue is no exception, while my sunburst from '60 with a slab fingerboard, still sounds stunning. It has a notably darker resonance. I actually bought the blue one, which has a scalloped nut, from a friend who bought it from Norman's Rare Guitars shop in California. It would seem it didn't have a tremolo arm, so the guy took one off a '59 Strat. As a purist >

Above **Fender Jaguars and Jazzmaster – all 1960s**

Above (l-r) **1960 Fender Stratocaster, 1965 Fender Stratocaster**

collector, I'm a little upset that there's a '59 out there somewhere with the wrong arm! Lake Placid Blue is such an iconic and pretty rare colour, I also have it on my 60s Fender Jaguar, although it's a little worn around the edges.

Ever the completist, Richard has always sort to build up full sets of guitars, even when they might not be to his taste...

"To me, Jaguars and Jazzmasters are an acquired taste in both sound and playability," he explains. "They're not really my cup of tea, but when they were affordable I wanted one of each model. I felt the same way about Fender Broncos and Duo-Sonics as well, it was a case of whatever came my way. I bought a sunburst Musicmaster in the USA simply because I was there recording an album in a band called AS-IS. I just wanted to say I'd bought a guitar in America. I trawled through several magazines and this seemed the best deal. It's all part of collecting – what I would describe as the guitar treasure hunt."

"As a collector, I'm a little upset that there's a '59 out there somewhere with the wrong arm!"

You don't assemble such an enviable collection of classics by accident, and Richard always had a goal in mind, even if things have changed over the years.

"My original plan had always been to collect iconic milestones within guitar history," he confirms. "But I was also inspired by oddities like Veleno and American Showster – the latter being built by Rick Excellente in Maplewood, New Jersey around '84. These exquisite guitars and basses were designed around the tail fin of a '57 Chevrolet. This one is from the AS Series, is loaded with Floyd Rose pickups and the flagship flashing red tail light activated by the vibrato arm.

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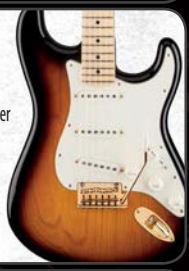

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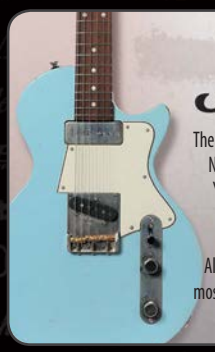

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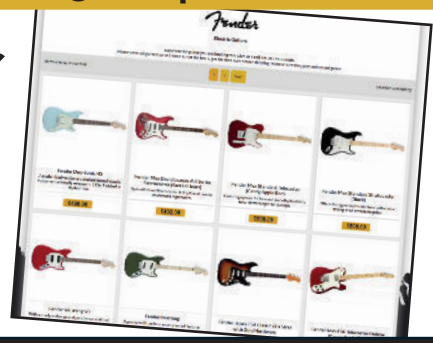

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manufacturing engineer. The two body halves cut from aluminium are held together with Allen keys, they were available in chrome or gold with hardware and pickup options. My chrome version is loaded with a pair of Guild humbuckers. As it's all metal, including the neck and fingerboard, tuning can be prone to temperature changes. It's arguably the most 'rock star' guitar that I own – I believe less than 200 were produced, and they were owned by Mark Bolan, Jeff Lynne, Ronnie Montrose, Johnny Winter and Greg Allman."

"As it's all metal, including the neck and fingerboard, tuning can be prone to temperature changes"

The most unique guitar in this collection of classics and curios is no doubt his striking '8-Guitar'. "I know this is a one-off, as I had it built purposely for Straight8UK. I drew up some designs and made a prototype, which I took to Chris Eccleshall in 1981 – one of the finest British guitar makers from that period and still going strong today. It's a striking looking beast with holes through the eight-shaped body and headstock. I also kept the electrics to a minimum with just one pickup and a single volume control."

A rocker he may be, but like most 60s players, he grew up on healthy doses of pure British pop music, and Richard's got the guitars to match.

"I loved the mid 60s, all we did at school was talk about The Beatles," he explains. "John Lennon and a Rickenbacker just kick-started the whole rock 'n' roll thing for me, he was the reason I picked up a guitar. The story goes that he had his natural Ricky 325 sprayed black, so I bought a natural and a black model, which sound the part through any of my Vox AC30s. They've always been my favourite amp. When I was touring, I had three on the go, one for gigs one for spare and one in the repair shop. I have six here, two black and four beige, one of which is an early AC30/4 with just four inputs." >

Above left (l-r) **Rickenbacker 325s**
Top right (l-r) **1994 Gibson Les Paul Classic & Gibson Les Paul Custom**
Bottom right **American Showster AS Series**

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Top left (l-r) **Fender Broncos, Musicmasters and Duo-Sonic**
Bottom left (l-r) **1931 Gibson L-10, 1957 Gibson Les Paul Junior, Supro Rhythm Master Val-Trol, 1960s Vox Phantom XII**
Opposite **Höfner 175**

"I'm stuck in the 60s for the next few guitars we'll be looking at, including my Höfner 175, also known as the 'Tandoori' because of the vinyl covering that is still in excellent condition here, as the material was prone to shrinkage. I believe these were the experimental years – just look at the Art Deco concept on my solid-bodied Fenton-Weill, which is another legendary brand from British guitar building."

While his electric sensibilities make up the bulk of Richard's collection, like any of us, he's found room for a couple of acoustics for when it's time to unplug...

"I'm not that much of an acoustic player really," he admits. "But there are three here that I'm glad I have in the collection, including one of the long lost Maccaferri plastic guitars from the 50s that were found untouched in a warehouse in the 80s. I have all the tags and the original cardboard box for my G-40. They originally sold for about £50, but they're collectable now so prices have risen dramatically. There are still some good deals out there like this Silvertone archtop L562 Colorama Kentucky Blue from the early 60s.

"Going even further back, to think my '31 Gibson L-10 is now 80 years old and still sounds good – it's quite remarkable. I didn't really have any intention of buying a classic archtop acoustic from the 30s, I simply bought this one because it was black!"

"My Gibson L-10 is now 80 years old and still sounds good – it's quite remarkable"

With such a large collection, having somewhere to keep them is always an issue, and Dave is thinking of downsizing... to a point. "I think it's time to slow down and thin out my collection," he insists, before countering. "But if anyone has a Firebird I, please get in touch!"

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11094

All about... Neck Profiles

The feel of a instrument's neck is a deal-breaker for most guitar buyers. **HUW PRICE** gets to grips with the shapes of things...

The word 'profile' is one of those catch-all terms in the guitar world – much like 'action' – which may mean different things to different people. When considering what neck profile actually means for us as guitar players, it's helpful to break the concept down into its constituent parts and see how they interact with each other.

You might imagine that playability and player comfort have always been the determining factors behind neck profiles, but that presupposes that we all find one particular profile to be the most comfortable and playable. Besides this, a neck's basic structural stability and the whims of fashion have also played a part.

Feel the width

Recently, I used the throwaway phrase 'fat neck' on a forum and somebody picked me up on it. He wanted me to clarify whether I meant wide or deep and, on reflection, I had to concede that he had a point.

We routinely provide neck dimensions with our guitar reviews and the vast majority of electric necks are the same width at the nut and 12th fret – 43mm and 53mm, or thereabouts. These dimensions have been fairly constant since the 50s, but there are exceptions. Some players, particularly shredders, come from a classical background and feel more comfortable with wider necks and string spacing. It stands to reason that seven-string guitars will have wider necks. Some of the vintage Gretsch models, such as the Super Chet, can also be wider at the nut, because they were designed for fingerstylists who prefer more space between the strings.

During the mid-60s, Gibson necks went in the opposite direction and you can find electrics and acoustics from that era with nuts narrower than 40mm. Slimmer 'fast' necks gained popularity for a time after the 1950s, but most agree this is when Gibson took the slimmer-neck concept too far. Seasoned guitarists who have played countless guitars can usually adjust quickly to any shape or depth. However, nut width – or rather, the string spacing at the nut – can cause experienced players problems. Banging out some rhythm or playing solos is usually fine, but when fingerpicking, a millimetre or less either way can be enough to throw technique into disarray.

Dedicated acoustic players seem more attuned to this and they can be very exacting about neck width and string spacing. In fact, many players commission custom builds precisely because they can't always get the dimensions that they really want from factory-made instruments.

The general trend from the early 1950s to the mid-60s was for progressively skinnier necks

In depth

Although ambiguous as we've discussed, when such terms as 'fat' and 'thin' are used to describe necks, they're generally assumed to refer to depth – the measurement from the highest point of the fingerboard to the centre of the back. At first, neck depth was predicated on resisting string pull, so greater depth was required to prevent steel strings from bending necks upwards and rendering the guitar unplayable.

Eventually, manufacturers started reinforcing necks with ebony or steel bars embedded into the wood. Later, truss rods counteracted this string pull and even provided the possibility for adjustment. Consequently, guitar makers were able to carve thinner necks – and marketing departments had a field day.

Although some companies were slower to react than others, the general trend from the early 50s to the mid-60s was for progressively skinnier necks. Things settled down through the 70s to be less characterful – even nondescript, if you prefer – but super-skinny, yet often wide, necks were all the rage through the 80s.

Since then, the 'fashion' element of neck measurements has become less of a factor and neck depths have become like denim jeans – whether bootcut or super skinny, it's more about personal taste. Consequently, there's no 'standard' neck depth and the major guitar manufacturers offer all their main models in a variety of shapes and sizes.

Over time, various gems of received wisdom have gained general acceptance. Examples of these include that skinny necks play faster and are better suited to players with small hands, or that fat necks are good for rhythm players but no good for soloing. Don't believe a word of it... If you haven't tried a fat 50s-style neck, then go and try out a Gibson Collector's Choice or an early 50s Telecaster reissue to discover what you're missing.

At first, a really well carved, fat neck may feel daunting, but you may be surprised how quickly it begins to feel comfortable. After 10 minutes or so, you may wonder why your fretting hand feels no fatigue whatsoever and when you do eventually tear yourself away to play a skinnier-necked guitar, you may discover it's like a flimsy toy in comparison. Then again, you might not, but you can have a lot of fun trying.

Shape up

This is the big one: the factor that can really distinguish one neck from another and most profoundly affect the feel and vibe of an instrument. When it comes to classifying shapes, broadly speaking, various neck

A Gibson technician working on a neck at the company's Nashville Custom Shop

profiles are designated letter codes roughly corresponding to their shape (see our neck shape diagram on p118).

Most of the early steel-string flat-top and archtop guitars had V- and deep C-shaped profiles, although the rigidity of the multi-ply laminate necks employed by some archtop makers gave then sufficient strength to be carved thinner.

V necks can be likened to tall, thin back braces in an acoustic. The depth maintains rigidity and as a result of material having been removed from the sides, the neck feels like less of a handful. Of all the classic profiles, the V is perhaps the one that's seen least on reissues, but to a certain type of player, a V can feel fantastic.

It takes considerable skill to carve fat and rounded necks that feel slipper-comfortable, rather than merely an unwieldy handful. Although the term 'baseball bat' is swung around in the guitar world, it really doesn't do justice to the considerable craft that goes into carving really good fat necks.

The secret seems to be in avoiding square shoulders, and back in the 50s nobody did it better than Gibson. Fortunately, Gibson is getting it right again on some of its vintage reissue models. You should always look for visible binding or fretboard lines when the neck is viewed square-on from the back. If you can't see the lines, it means the curve begins from the bottom of the binding and not from the top.

Other neck variations include D, wide C, flat C, flat D, modern C and U. You can also get hard Vs, soft Vs and hybrids that transition from soft V or flat C to D or U as you move up the neck.

Some makers even carve asymmetric profiles, designed to enhance comfort and assist fretting-hand positioning. Some prefer the bass side to be more rounded and some prefer roundness on the treble side. You can even get 'progressive' asymmetrical necks, where the apex point is closest to the bass side at the first fret and gradually moves closer to the treble side.

The Gretsch Custom Shop offers a variety of neck profiles

Effect on tone

Relatively few discussions of neck size seem to touch on the implications for tone. Yet all things have a resonance frequency and if the weight of the body has a bearing on tone, it stands to reason that neck mass must have some influence, too. A friend who owns an almost identical T-type to me was always commenting on how much he preferred the tone of mine. His was the same age, had a similar swamp ash body, was virtually the same weight and even had the same frets and hardware – but his had a very fat and rounded 50s profile compared to the slimmer and skinnier neck on mine.

Where mine had a warmer, thicker and more midrange-y tone, his was clearer, snappier and brighter, with better sustain. Rather than allow him to fall down the rabbit hole of pickup swapping and hardware upgrades, I suggested we might try swapping the necks.

Since both of the guitars came from the same builder, the procedure was straightforward and the conclusion was rather inescapable.

Of all the classic profiles, the V is perhaps the one that's seen least on reissues, but to a certain type of player, a V can feel fantastic

The sonic characteristics of the two migrated with the necks and the builder subsequently shaved down the fat neck for reasons of tone, rather than playability.

The client was happy with the outcome, but in retrospect, I should have offered to swap necks, because the original was a doozy and I preferred the sound! Since then, I've carried out numerous neck swaps and they've always resulted in a tonal change – though not always for the better.

In the late 80s, I recall Jerry Donahue explaining how he assesses Fenders. Before even playing them, he taps the neck, then taps the body to determine whether they're compatible. He looks for tap tones that are in unison, thirds or fifths, and if these two fundamental building blocks of the instrument do not ring in harmony, he knows that no pickups or fancy hardware will ever elevate it to the status of a great guitar.

You can draw your own conclusions, of course, but experience has led me to believe that neck size (and therefore mass) does affect tone. It's about sustain, snappiness, clarity and frequency balance more than frequency range, but opinions will quite rightly vary on whether the difference is significant enough to justify compromising feel and playability.

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Chord Clinic

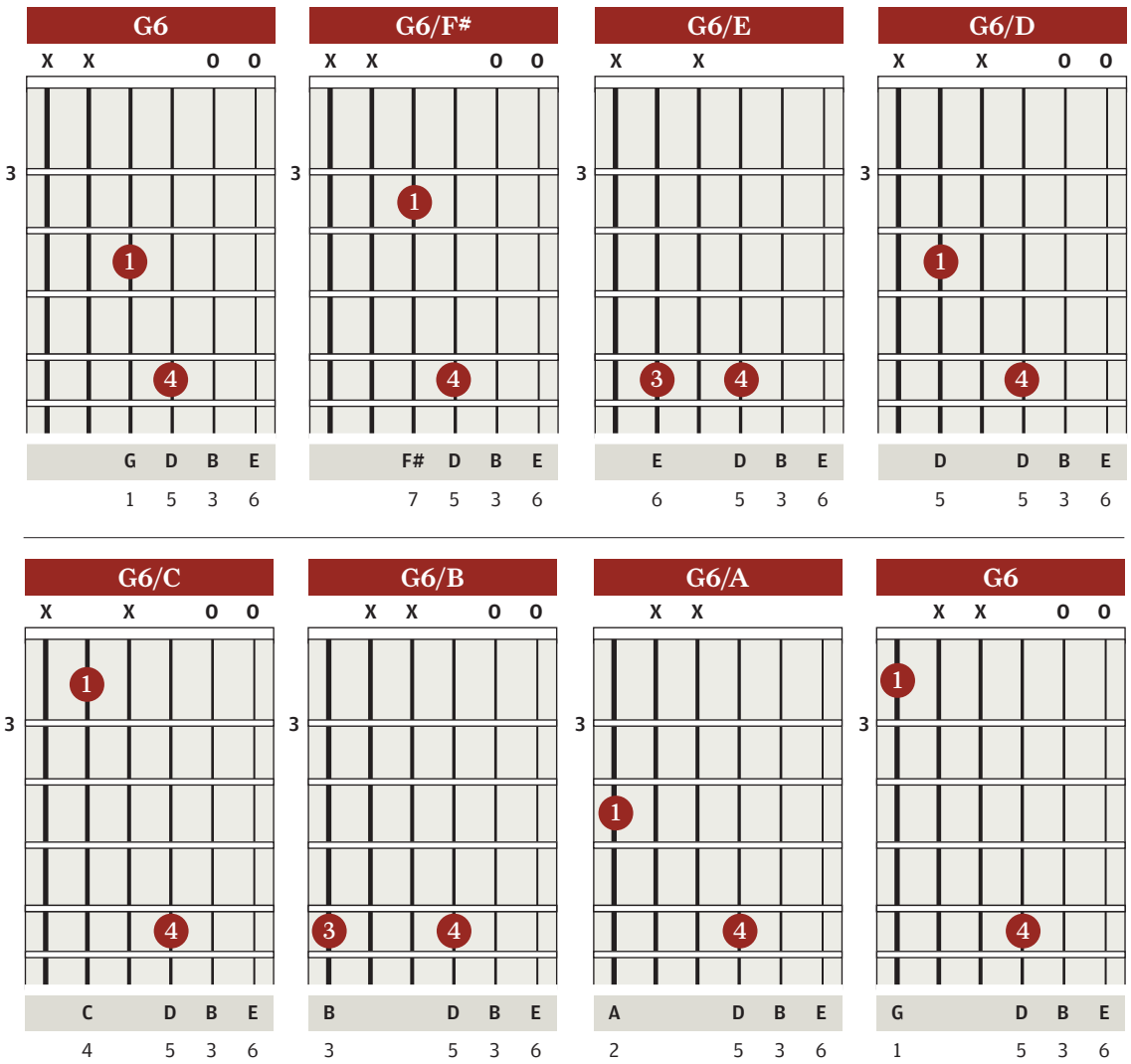
In this month's Chord Clinic we continue our investigation of chord voicings that use open strings to create interesting textures. **ROD FOGG** picks some arpeggios...

The open strings of the guitar offer a huge range of possibilities for drones and pedal notes. Last month's instalment found some interesting sounds in the keys of A and E minor and C and F major. This month we're concentrating on G and D major.

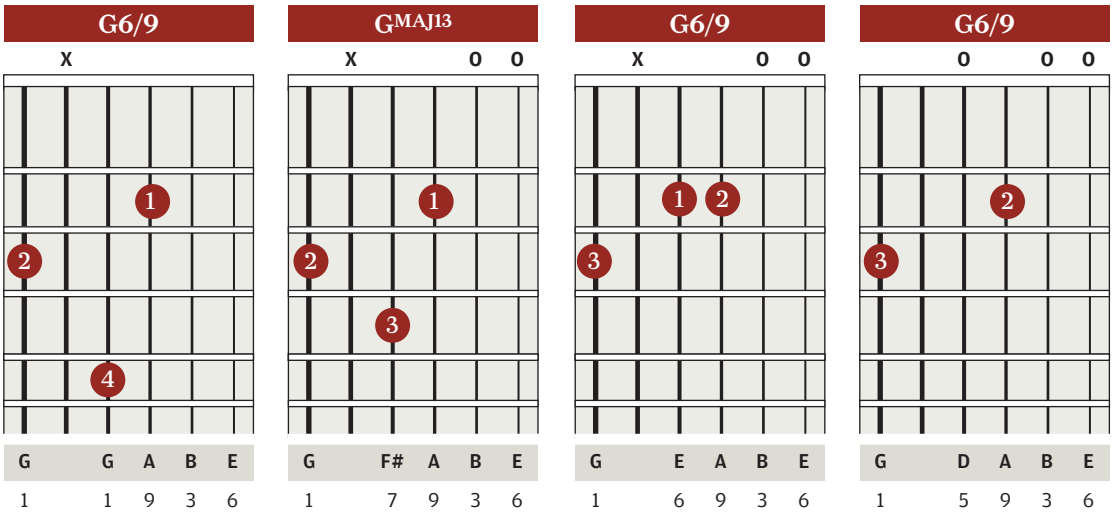
Starting with a cluster of interesting notes and then adding a moving bassline should give you the idea of what this month's lesson is all about. Figure 1 begins with an unusual voicing for a G6 chord, which makes it possible to play your way through an entire G major scale in the bass. This example works particularly well with a fast fingerstyle arpeggio using your thumb on the bass note. Chords such as G6/F# are examples of 'slash chords' where the chord name is given first and the letter name after the forward slash is a specified bass note. We've been very flexible about how we name these chords; they are named for how they sound in context as G major chords – many of them don't even contain the note G!

You can experiment with a sequence like this, perhaps by playing just the first four chords as a repeating four-bar pattern. Also, some of the bass notes are available in more than one location – you could try A and D as open strings, for example, or C at the eighth fret on the bottom string; this has the benefit of avoiding the stretch to the third fret. This sort of chord progression sounds >

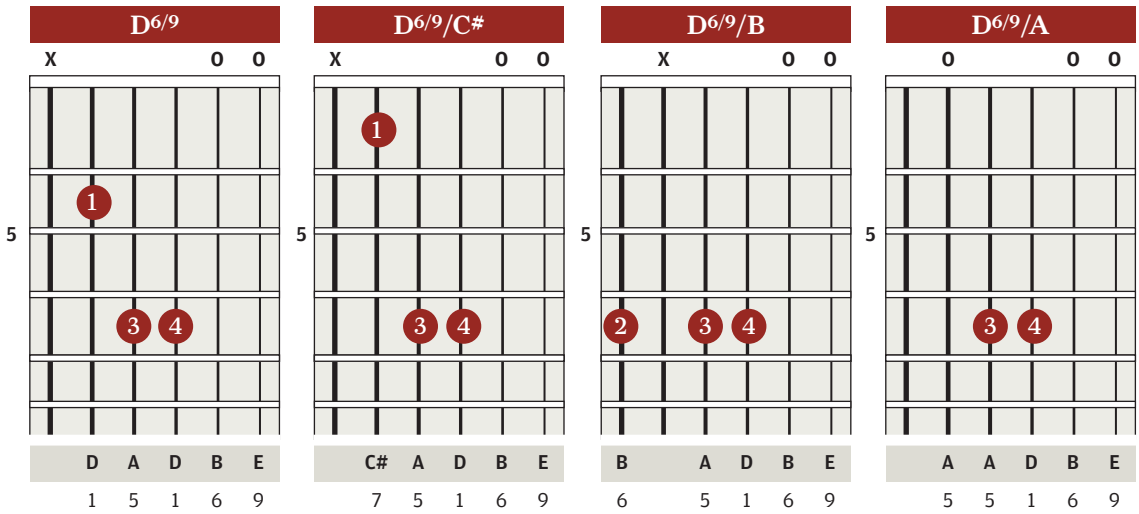
Nothin' but a G6 thing (Fig 1)



Got nine on it (Fig 2)



If 6 was 9 (Fig 3)



interesting because of the relatively high D on the G string sounding against, and slightly dissonant with, the open E.

We're not quite finished with G major, as Figure 2 introduces a ninth into the chord, this time with a descending line as an inner part played on the D string. Again, this one will sound better with arpeggios. If you have last month's *G&B* check out Figure 3 in the Chord Clinic and see if you can put together a revolving eight bar sequence using those C major seven chords.

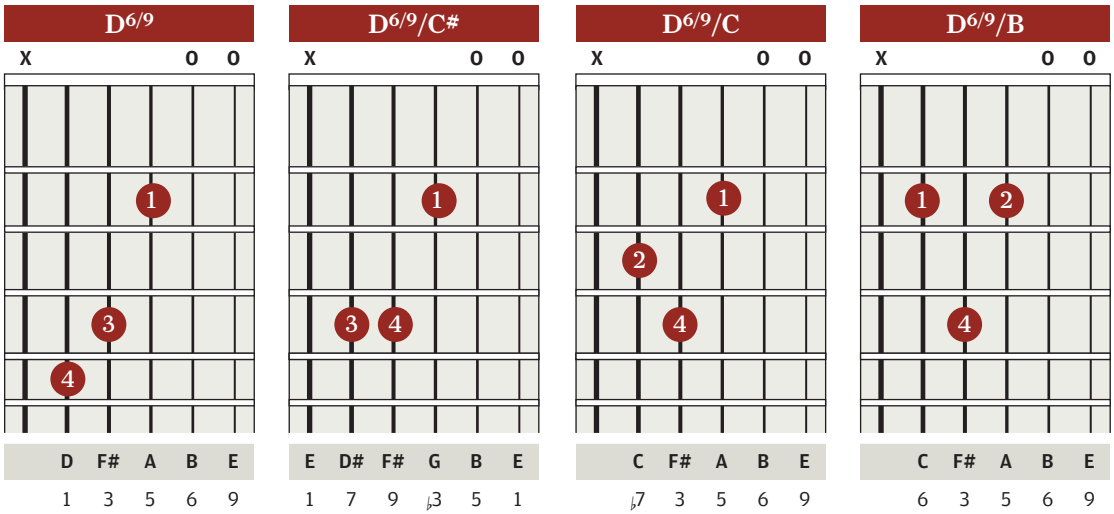
Figure 3 switches to D major, where the top two open strings of the guitar, B and E, are the sixth and ninth respectively. Once again we have a moving bassline which responds well to flowing finger style arpeggios. Try leading straight onto figure two to make an eight-bar chord sequence. You might be able to work in some elements of figure 1 as well, perhaps together with the aforementioned C major chords from last month's mag.

Staying with D major, Figure 4 introduces another way to play the descending bassline, this time with the point of interest coming from the A on the G string sounding against the open B, as opposed to the high D on the G string sounding against the open E. We also introduce, in the third chord, a C natural in the bass, which seems to propel the chord sequence back towards G major. If you'd prefer to use D major as your home key leave out this chord and make a four-chord sequence by cycling back towards D6/9/C#.

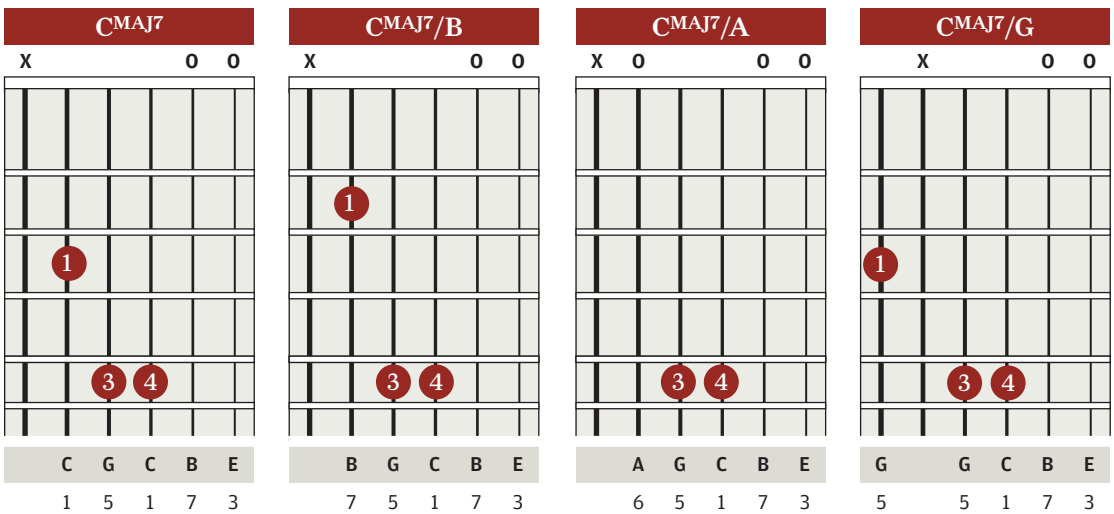
Finally, Figure 5 offers you the chance to play a similar descending bassline, this time in C major, using as a starting point the C major seven chord from last month's instalment, but this time with the movement coming from the bassline rather than the centre of the chord. Somewhere in this month's Chord Clinic there is a good song or a dreamy guitar instrumental... you just need to experiment a bit to find it!

All these chord sequences seem to work well with arpeggios, but they do not necessarily have to be played fingerstyle, and though they seem to suggest acoustic accompaniment techniques neither do they have to be played on acoustic. We had loads of fun playing them with a pick on electric guitar going through a slow flanger and pulsing tremolo pedal. See you for more chord fun next month!

Going down (Fig 4)



Still going down (Fig 5)



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Fretbuzz

Your letters. This month: the importance of headstocks, more relic'ing chat and short-scale string theory...

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Head in the clouds

Hi guys – just picked up the new *All About Guitar* [the latest in our *G&B Classics* series, on sale now! – Ed] and have to say what a great publication it is! Okay, it is essentially just a collection of articles from recent past issues of *G&B* and, as such, regular readers will already have most, if not all, of the info already. But that's not the point for me – you guys to have collected all that super-useful information into one tome that you can keep at hand for reference instead of trawling through back issues, and that's worth the cover price in saved time alone!

Having said that, I do have one minor criticism about the mag proper. Namely, some recent gear reviews have omitted to show the headstock of the models in question (the PRS and Oilcan models in the March issue being a case in point). Putting aside the criteria of price and playability, as a potential customer I want a guitar to be aesthetically pleasing, and think that the body/headstock combination plays a major part in this.

Although I fully understand their attempts to avoid blatantly plagiarising the classic headstock shapes by coming up with something original, I'm tempted to say that while in my personal opinion some brands are successful with this, others fail spectacularly and it ruins the overall vibe of the guitar.

So, please in future show us the headstocks – we need to see them! Anyway, keep up the good work – glad I've got that off my chest!

Keith Guest, via email

G&B There's nothing worse than a gorgeous guitar being ruined by an ugly or incongruous headstock, Keith. Wherever possible we endeavour to show the full guitar, but in our quest to give you as much new gear as possible, sometimes space limitations stop us from showing every bit of gear in the detail that we'd like. It's a fair point though, and we'll try our best to avoid it whenever we can!

WRITTEN A LETTER OF THE MONTH?

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Boots are made for walking

In response to Andy Redding's letter of last issue [Emperor's New Clothes, May 2017] – I get where Andy's is coming from about battered guitars, but I can't agree. When I gig (usually in a tiny corner of a pub) I'd rather have my well-worn Strat than a pristine guitar that may get knocked off its stand by a pissed punter! A battered guitar is like a favourite pair of boots to me!

Nick, via email

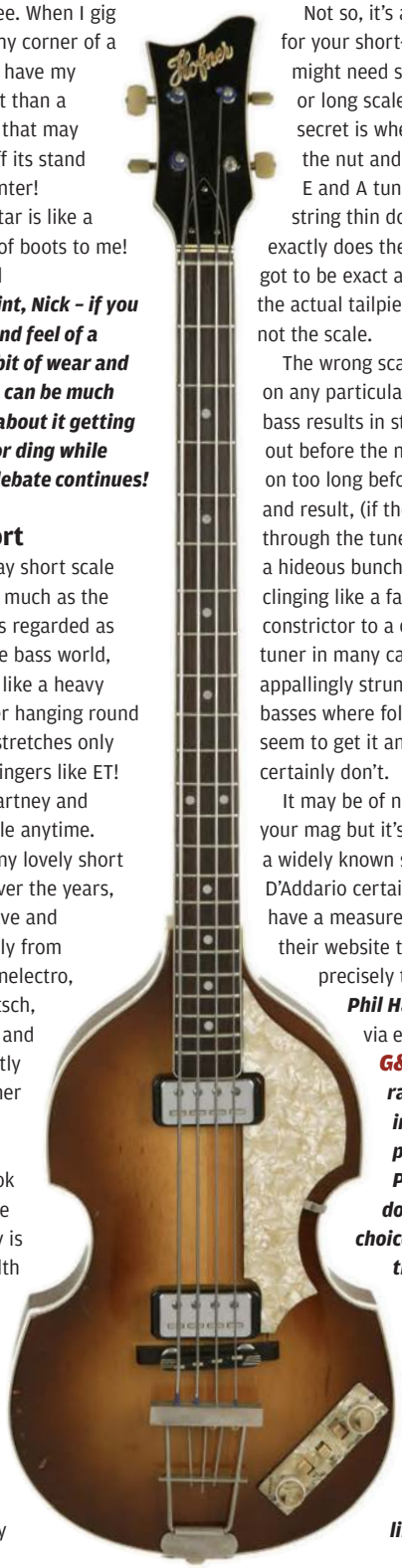
G&B Good point, Nick – if you like the look and feel of a guitar with a bit of wear and tear on it, you can be much less precious about it getting the odd dent or ding while gigging. The debate continues!

Caught short

Dear *G&B*, I play short scale basses, and as much as the 34-inch scale is regarded as de rigeur in the bass world, I for one don't like a heavy builder's ladder hanging round my neck with stretches only possible with fingers like ET! Give Paul McCartney and I a 30-inch scale anytime.

I've had many lovely short scale basses over the years, both inexpensive and extremely costly from the likes of Danelectro, Epiphone, Gretsch, Squier, Gibson and more. I presently have a CT Höfner Club, that obviously I'm modding to look more expensive than it actually is just like a wealth of other bass snobs on YouTube!

That said, there is one thing about playing a short-scale bass that really is a challenge – getting the right strings for the scale length! Never believe outright the guy in the shop that says, "Short scale bass, mate? You want short scale strings!"



Not so, it's a minefield and for your short-scale bass you might need short, medium or long scale strings. The secret is where, in regard to the nut and especially the E and A tuners, does the string thin down, ie where exactly does the silk start. It's got to be exact and depends on the actual tailpiece-to-nut length not the scale.

The wrong scale length strings on any particular short-scale bass results in strings that thin out before the nut (awful), or go on too long before thinning out and result, (if they'll even go through the tuner hole/slot) in a hideous bunch of fat strings clinging like a fat metallic boa constrictor to a quite small tuner in many cases. I've found appallingly strung second-hand basses where folks just don't seem to get it and shops that certainly don't.

It may be of no interest for your mag but it's certainly not a widely known science, D'Addario certainly used to have a measurement guide on their website that addressed precisely this problem.

Phil Harley, via email

G&B You've raised some interesting points there, Phil. There's no doubt that string choice, like so many things to do with guitars and basses, is a hugely subjective area. Would any other short-scale bass players like to chip in?

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New Music

We round up and rate a selection of this month's guitar-driven album releases and reissues

John Mayer

THE SEARCH FOR EVERYTHING

In the 11 years since John Mayer's masterpiece, *Continuum*, the guitarist has seemingly gleaned more headlines for his personal life than his music. But after taking a country-folk diversion on 2013's *Paradise Valley*, Mayer is ready to be a pop star again – or as he told the *New York Times*, "I want to make music and be thought of as attractive." Quite. *The Search For Everything* definitely feels like a pitch for the mainstream – with shiny, soul-infused Doobie Brothers pop tunes making moody blues of *Continuum* feel like a long time ago. But even when he's not got his guitar set to stun, his monster chops are undeniable – a fact only emphasised by the myriad crystal clear Stratty tones. Sadly however, *TSFE*'s 16 tracks contain too many forgettable ballads and too few hook-heavy groovers such as *Moving On And Getting Over*. **GJ**

6/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Shawn Mendes, Jason Mraz*

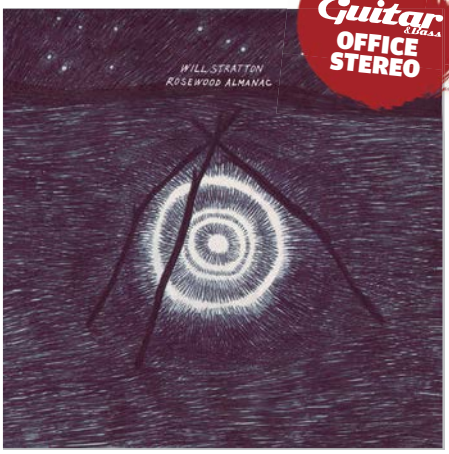
At The Drive In

IN•TER A•LI•A

The last time an At The Drive In released a new studio album, Bill Clinton was president, the dot-com bubble was bursting and MiniDiscs were the future of music… so, apart from losing their hyphen, what's changed for the Texan post-hardcore pioneers in 17 years? Fundamentally, not a lot – and that's no bad thing. Original guitarist Jim Ward has been replaced by his Sparta bandmate Keeley Davies, and he teams with Omar Rodríguez-López to weave angsty, noisy guitar bedlam across these 11 tracks. *Pendulum In A Peasant Dress* is a great example of this, with a driving beat underpinning duelling guitar lines that veer from seat-of-your pants scallic lines to glitchy noise and back again at will. Cedric Bixler's vocals may lack some of the power he had as a younger man, but this is still a welcome return. **GJ**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Fugazi, Sparta*



Will Stratton

ROSEWOOD ALMANAC

New York-based songwriter Will Stratton is music composition graduate and so it's no surprise that his seventh album, *Rosewood Almanac*, sees him weave delicate fingerpicked parts through layered arrangements that pull in piano, strings, electric and even the odd saxophone (but don't hold it against him). The chiming 12-string of opener, *Light Blue*, has a dreamy Laurel Canyon vibe, but with a driving purpose that recalls Jeff Buckley, while the *Thick Skin* sees Stratton worship at the altar of his folk heroes, accented beautifully with strings and piano. Standout *Some Ride* allows us to appreciate Stratton's voice and simple, atmospheric fingerstyle unaccompanied – in an acoustic scene that's increasingly preoccupied with showing off, it's a timely reminder of the power of letting your playing serve the songs. **JG**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Nick Drake, Ryley Walker*

Blaenavon

THAT'S YOUR LOT

Hampshire trio Blaenavon have been paying their dues since they were 16, but it's taken four years for this debut album to hit. On the whole it's worth the wait, as they sidestep most of the landfill indie pitfalls that snare many young bands, delivering an assured set of songs that meld the dynamics and intensity of Foals with the intricate single-note clean lines of guitarist Ben Gregory. A promising first salvo, but one that doesn't quite capture their live ferocity. **JG**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Foals, The Hunna*

Brad Paisley

LOVE AND WAR

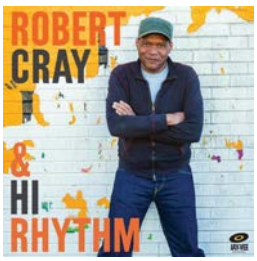
The country megastar's 11th album is notable for its collaborators – a Johnny Cash poem is set to music, and Mick Jagger sings on a co-write, plus Bill Anderson and John Fogerty also get on board. Some of its 16 tracks bend the boundaries of the country formula – politics and social-media saturation aren't common country themes – but Brad proves with every solo that he remains Nashville's pre-eminent picker – an extremely hard-won accolade. **CM**

8/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Keith Urban, Vince Gill*

Robert Cray & Hi Rhythm

ROBERT CRAY & HI RHYTHM



Cray's latest project sees the five-time Grammy winner team up with legendary Memphis soul backing band the Hi Rhythm Section, in their hallowed Royal Studios. It's the perfect matchup: Cray's vocals soar over the catalogue of varied soul covers (plus three originals), while his stinging Strat lines bob and weave against the note-perfect backdrop provided by a band who've played in the same room for 50 years. **CM**

7/10

TRY IF YOU LIKE *Al Green, Bill Withers*

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WIN!

A THORPYFX WARTHOG OVERDRIVE/ DISTORTION PEDAL WORTH £185!

This month we're giving one lucky *Guitar & Bass* reader the chance to win a stunning Warthog overdrive/distortion from UK boutique stompbox maker, ThorpyFX. Created by British Army Major and engineer Adrian Thorpe, ThorpyFX pedals are made in the UK to an exceptionally high standards. The Neutrik jack sockets and true-bypass footswitch – rated at many thousands of cycles – are off-board to maximise road-worthiness, while WIMA and Panasonic capacitors, a Burr Brown op-amp, and metal film resistors with a one per cent tolerance further give the internals a premium vibe.

We looked at the Warthog back in the May 2016 issue, and were hugely impressed, bestowing a G&B Choice award on it. *G&B* editor Chris Vinnicombe had this to say in his review: "Anyone with a fondness for 1990s American alternative rock will love the Warthog. Imagine a great RAT pedal that occupies the space between overdrive and fuzz, minus the over-compressed response that often stops a RAT cutting through live."

For more information on the Warthog and the entire ThorpyFX range, head to **thorpyfx.com**. To be in with a chance of winning this fantastic pedal, visit the link below and answer the following question:
guitar-bass.net/comps/warthog

Competition question:
Which of the following is NOT the name of a pedal in the current ThorpyFX range?

a) Veteran **b)** Peacekeeper **c)** Private

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